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Foreword

The debate between the Modern and the Traditional is never-ending as it refuses to come to grips with the colonial experience. The Subcontinent went through a paroxysm of reconstruction after the destructive conquests in the 18th century. To be modern meant the submission to and aping the ruling British and the yearning for freedom led to the clashing of the traditional modes that then gave meaning to life. This tug-of-war tore the soul apart. Art in its widest manifestation, painting, poetry or others, gave play to this struggle over the years since independence. The exhibition shows the vitality and relevance of the endeavor to find meaning in today’s maestros of existence in countries that have experienced the colonial yoke.

The Institute for Art and Culture is happy to host the exhibition, as it is relevant to the Institute’s search for an expression that moves forward combining knowledge as it has come down to us through the centuries with what the present day science and technology have to offer. The arts and crafts of Pakistan are a rich mining field, a nourishing soil where new forms and ideas may sprout.

I would like to recognize the curator Sadia Pasha and her team for this exhibition which has been organized as a Collateral Event of LBD-02.

I wish the exhibition all success in promoting new avenues and ideas in Art.

Prof. Sajida Haider Vandal
Vice Chancellor,
Institute for Art & Culture.

Exordium

Art in Pakistan since the beginning of the 21st century is inextricable from the perpetual discourse of it being traditional or modern, indigenous or foreign. Issues arise in the face of photography, conceptual art, installation, virtual imaging, digital technologies, the World or simply lacking in its appearance as Eastern, Islamic or indigenous. It is this last ‘accusation’ that compelled me to open up the debate once again, on what can be traditional or modern in art in the context of Pakistan. The discussion might appear outdated or saturated to a practitioner of art but it was seldom recorded hence, a little scholarship is available. Moreover, as an educationalist, I intend to provide to the curiosity of a layman who has recently been introduced to art. To such an audience, contemporary, modern art is a big monster that gorges all genres, all mediums and all expressions of art. Public art, street art, high art, low art, pop art, not so popular art, outdated, and conventional art all come out of the big art churning machine to be in the limelight only to be faded again. Contemporary art is the center stage, a vulnerable place which is being manipulated with the discourse on identity politics and multiculturalism making it inevitable to unravel the subject.

Two attitudes are relevant to explain this tussle between tradition and modern in our scenario. They have been inherited from the overall social, political and economic situations which inform of troubled, chaotic times. One attitude propagates that contemporary conceptual art, in Pakistan, is a product of pseudo-intellectuals who, under the Western influence produced art for the foreign market. This notion also confers that such art does not reflect or represent the ideals of indigenous art-making. The other attitude implied that the contemporary art of Pakistan is going strong and while keeping its identity intact, earning laurels in the global art market. In defense of such an approach, it is stated that art in Pakistan has fused into innovative hybrids with other art forms and has transformed itself to transcend its former limitation. The advocates of such art also talk about art beyond borders, global village and 21st century technology to justify these otherworldly artistic expressions. These incongruous notions are not only found in art but also in the history of art and art education.
in a country like Pakistan, with a low literacy rate, not many are formally introduced to art as a discipline of education. Out of this educated lot, very few have ever been to a museum or an art gallery. To this big chunk of population with no background in art, the discourses of conceptual art make no sense and they don’t easily get connected with it. In addition, the theoretical aspect of such art remains incomprehensible for the very little ratio of population that do visit exhibits. The system of education and the curriculum, under the influence of political agendas, favored concepts like Islamization that somewhat has reduced art to be an unnecessary evil for society it is time to address all these issues adeptly. The essay ‘Tracing the Notions of Modernity in Pakistani Art’ is an excerpt of the paper by the undersigned presented at the International conference ‘Rethinking the Modern through Shafik Ahsan held in 2016 organized by THIAP (Trust for History of Art & Architecture of Pakistan) in collaboration with IAC (Institute for Art & Culture, Lahore) and PNCA (Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad). This paper serves as a precursor of this exhibition ‘The Eighth Garden’, which exemplifies the promise for the modern in Pakistani art. The first episode of the exhibition was showcased at PNCA in conjunction with Islamabad Art Festival-19. The second and current show at IAC gallery is a collateral event for Lahore Biennal-02.

Dr. Sadia Pasha Kamran
Professor & Coordinator, School of Art, Institute for Art & Culture.

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Tracing the notions of Modernity in Pakistani art
Sadia Pasha Kamran

This research aims to characterize the modern art in Pakistan through the investigation of the temporality of the terms modern, modernity and modernism in general and particularly in art history. In doing so it compares the notes to the notions of modernity in the West and looks into the historical and political legacy of Pakistan to determine what is modern here. Broadly speaking the transition from medieval to modern in the South Asian context coincides with its being a colony, the struggle for independence and the post-colonial dilemmas. In the most popular local narrative colonialism is strongly condemned and only the adversities of the period are highlighted. Hence, the period is declared somewhat analogous to the ‘dark ages’ in the East, which obviously contradicts with the delineations of the modern. Keeping in mind the hostile bearings of the British Raj in India nevertheless taking a step forward and examining the social, structural as well as institutional development in 20th century India, can help one trace the path that modernized Pakistani art and took it to the height of recognition and celebration that it enjoys today.

The word modern is derived from Modo (Latin), meaning now as an opposite to the past of a tradition. Jonathan Swift, a 17th century Irish writer and poet is recorded to have used it in his short satire titled The Battle of the Books, in which traditional values in art and thought were opposed by more contemporary or modern ones. Since this time modern refers to being new, recent, innovative and somewhat distant and different from the past. The quality of being modern can be classified as modernity. Modernity focuses on the methodological, archival and theoretical approaches particular to recent, innovative studies. In common understanding, it is also constituted historically as a series of repeated attempts to escape history. It always exists within history and offers a "proleptic history of that future by explaining its own ability to generate...it poits the future as an escape from an entrapment with history, however, that conjecturing is always a gamble since the proleptic history may always be a new entrapment, a new specification". Such a conviction establishes temporality of the notions of modernity and it is deduced that the term can only be understood as it is evaluated by the practitioner of a specific time. On the contrary, modernity is also described as "a qualitative, not a chronological, category, just as it cannot be reduced to abstract form, with equal necessity it must turn its back on the conventional surface coherence, the appearance of harmony, the order corroborated merely by replication".

Modernity can be defined as an attitude towards modernity, a phenomenon that exerted a profound influence on the way we all think and experience our world today.
The principles are of course those of innovation, rejuvenation, and experimentation. The word modernism, however, is commonly used to describe certain 20th-century trends in the West mainly in fields of writing, criticism, philosophy, and art. Conventionally, such trends did not emerge out of anywhere rather a gradual metamorphosis took place in the course of time.

Talking of Western Art, Modernism dates back to the last decade of the 19th century. It appeared on the horizons of history somewhere at the juncture of two revolutions, French and Industrial, that led towards ‘the new and novel’ and is remembered as the age of enlightenment. The struggle of the emerging bourgeoisie against the ancient regime and efforts to hegemonize the poor that included the artisans are some of the important features of the time under discussion. In artistic discourses, these efforts of distancing from the past appeared as challenging the traditional method of representing three-dimensional spaces as well as threatening the conventional techniques of organization of space as during the Renaissance. Similarly, the moralistic subject matter related to the principles and the philosophic ideals of Neo-Classicism was replaced and the supremacy of emotion over the reason of Romanticism got substituted with new trends in art highlighting the public taste for the visual fact of realistic photography and the fascination to capture light and time as sought after in Impressionism.

In general, modernism encompasses the activities and output of those who considered traditional forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith and social organization as outdated in the new economic, social and political conditions of the industrialized world. In the case of the Indian Sub-continent, the traditional was already rejected by the British. The counteract of which was a wake-up call taken and answered by the revolutionary nationalists whose work displayed an invested effort to embrace traditional45. So, when we assume that modern is distancing from the past, in our case, are we talking of the near past (Allah Bux, A.R. Chughtai, etc.) or the real past, i.e. medieval or pre-modern aesthetics (Mughal and Rajput). What is tradition here? Is it the Indo-Islamic tradition or the borrowed European tradition that we were made to embrace during the 19th century?

History of modern art in Pakistan is not simple, neither is it linear. The reason for which is twofold: mainly the political past and secondly the history of art written during the last few decades, mostly by the locals who were amateur according to the modern inclination of the said discipline or the Europeans who once again failed to understand the potential of local art. An extensive study of these writings reveals that the misinterpretation of the terms modern and modernity became the cause of confusion that laid beneath the many vistas related to history of modern art in Pakistan including limiting art for the luxury of the elite, disapproval of art as a favored cultural expression, connotations of modernity only with the abstract art or European art as well as restricting the traditional art of India to the status of a craft. The traditional art of India e.g. the arts of the book had always involved the issues, fundamental to Western modern art; the issues of space, particularly abstraction, naturalism, infinity, and inquiry. Lack of required professional training and the formal knowledge of the theory of art and art criticism is one thing that led these writers to such conclusions but the more relevant vice was a prevailing slave mentality; the unquestioned hegemony of Parisian art and an inherited feeling of lowliness about the indigenous art expressions.

The prehistory of modern art in Pakistan finds the most unrelated political occurrences, the attempts to colonize India (as early as the 18th century) that followed the independence movement (in the 1850s that legitimized the British control) only to be amplified at its partition (in 1947). As modernity was imposed on India by the British, within the enclosure of ‘Orientalism and racism’ the pattern of change is different here. Unlike Europe, here the bourgeoisie emerged within the ranks of the colonized, it was limited by the foreign rule, in fact, protected from them and supported by the classes below them by the paternalism of colonial state. In such a scenario, the bourgeoisie did not have to develop a new, modern set of radical ideas and nor did they deal with the removal of the ancient regime. Here, the modern was foreign and not from within. It was a case of forced adoption instead of adaptation. No transformation or transitional phase, no age of enlightenment, in fact, a big superficial jump with the rejection of tradition to the imposition of what was never ours. The smooth appearance of lacking change at the horizon of the pictorial history was never witnessed resulting in the chaos that the modern art and art history of Pakistan exhibited.

However, there is a link between chaos and Modernism too. Following the chaos of World Wars, a movement emerged towards figuration, clean lines, and modeled forms away from the two-dimensional abstracted spaces, fragmented compositions, and splintered bodies of Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism, and other avant-garde styles prevalent at the dawn of 20th century. There was an increased interest in return to the order, synthesis and organization of Classicism rather than the previous emphasis on innovation at all costs. Such chaos and order with similar proportions appear in our part of the world as underneath the chaos and disorder of colonisation, fight for freedom and partition, art provided an unpredictable order from which patterns of change and advancement emerged over time. Or simply the chaos erupted bringing a realization of being at a dead-end and of the insufficiency of old adopted viewpoints, forcing the repressed ideals to prop up in new, novel and diverse forms that become one of the salient features of modern art in Pakistan.

At the time of partition, A. R. Chughtai and Allah Bux, Ania Molkha, Zuberah Agha, Nasir Shamsie are some of the prominent artists who set the pace of art in modern Pakistan. They had varied backgrounds, some with formal training of art and others acquired it through
practical experience but all of them carried forward, in one way or the other, the legacy of the colonial art. These artists simply practiced art according to their understanding and perception of the changing time they were living in. The institutions imparting art education were equally directionless. M M School of Art carried on the colonial policy of promoting the crafts while the Punjab University Fine Arts department followed the sensibilities of a young, ambitious foreigner also alien to the traditional art of the region. Thus, the classical, ornamental art of India has left aside only to be re-discovered and modernized later.

Most prominent, among the group of artists, who joined the art fraternity in Pakistan after partition around the 1950s known as ‘the pioneer’ of modern art or more ambitious writers would call him ‘the father of modern art in Pakistan’ is, Shaker Ali. It will not be an exaggeration to say that during the 50s, under the auspicious mentorship of modern artists trained in Europe, art in Pakistan, once again, acquired modernity that was not conceived in its own soil but was rather imported from the West. At the same time reducing the status of artists such as Shaker Ali to mere imitators of prevailing Persian aesthetics of the early 20th century would also be an overstatement and an unjustified act. It is true that Shaker Ali didn’t; initially, embraced the ideas of abstraction as discovering his own native tradition rather he did it merely with the European understanding, where it was a modern concept. He is inspired by Andre Lhote’s ideals of painting, at least in terms of surface treatment, use of geometric solid shapes, color palette and is inferred to be practicing Cubism. An important question is if he was practicing Cubism with the same understanding as perceived by the Western Cubists? The answer is ‘no’. Picasso and Braque studied their objects “as a surgeon dissects a cadaver”4 Picasso believed in de-construction and re-construction of the objects. He was painting and when fragmented objects appeared around 1909 in Braque’s works he was getting ‘as close as possible to the objects as the painting allowed it’.

All’s painting Village Scene with three Deers may remind us of the Bathers of Mattise but only in terms of placement of figures onto the picture plane. Abstraction as the core feature of the Islamic aesthetics promoting the ideas of divinity and infinity through it, is a vital component of South Asian tradition. However, was Shaker Ali practicing abstraction with similar connotations? There are no shred of evidence of this notion in his writings. George Steiner admits that “The modernist movement which dominated art, music, letters during the first half of the 20th century was, at critical points, a strategy of conservation of custodianship”.4 The point to ponder is that if we are calling Ali modern only because he was trained in Prague and Paris and spent time with Lhote, we are simply buying the European idea as sold by the self-called custodian of the modern world. It is time that we break the Euro-centric approach, define tradition for ourselves and delineate a path to modernize it in a way that it must evolve from within and not from a borrowed artistic legacy.

In other definitions, Modernism is perceived as an overall socially progressive trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve and reshape their environment with the aid of practical experimentation, scientific knowledge or technology. "In the 20th century, the social processes that bring this maelstrom into being, and keep it in a state of perpetual becoming, have come to be called modernisation". These world-historical processes have nourished an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their writing through the processes of the maelstrom and make it their own. Over the past century, these visions and values have come to be loosely grouped together under the name of modernism5. With a similar attitude, the socialists, the leftists, the writers, the poets, the artists got together at places like Pak Tea house in Lahore and played an important role in modernizing the overall mindset of the Pakistani society. They empowered themselves and others around them which itself is a modern concept. Some modernists did see themselves as part of a revolutionary culture, one that included political revolution. Others rejected conventional politics as well as artistic conventions, believing that a revolution of political consciousness had greater importance than a change in political structures. Many modernists saw themselves as apolitical. Others who rejected mass popular culture from a conservative position argue that modernism in literature and art functioned to sustain an elite culture that excluded the majority of the population.6 Ali would also claim to be "not interested in political and social issues" though his works The Dark Moon and Men would speak immensely of life, human destiny and war.

To many Europeans, who are writing about art in Pakistan, modern art appears to be just the structural adjustment and an effort to decolonize the art of British India. The fact is that this decolonization was spilled out in words somewhere in the 1960s and got popular in Pakistan only during the ‘90s before that time the artist fraternity was busy confronting Zia’s Marshal Law and rising Islamic fundamentalists. In another way, the artists were simply getting together forming an identity for themselves and realizing their strength and these are the salient features of modern art in Pakistan.

In a nutshell, there are various routes to understand the term modern (i.e. epistemological, grammatical, philosophical, political and cultural). The foundations of modern art in Pakistan were not laid by the locals. They were either set by the foreign academics or the foreign-trained artists who were simply fascinated with the ideals of Western modernity. The attitude to acknowledge the Western and/or European supremacy was the result of an inherent complexity that was passed on to us by the colonial past. Thus, the greatest problems when trying to engage with the question of modernity in Pakistan is that our means of understanding and assumptions about our time (post-independence), space, people, individuals, histories, truths, facts, myths, art, and culture were, to a certain extent are determined by the forces outside our own realm.
In art, this situation was dealt at various levels and that is why there are layers of meaning within a single expression of art. The art produced in Pakistan during the first few decades after independence, on one hand, speaks immensely of these socio-political and cultural happenings and on the other, it reveals the emotional and psychological confrontations of a group of liberated artists. Here, the visuals open up a space for critique and resistance and in doing so artists re-appropriated control of the visual as part of a wider effort of socio-political liberation, and cultural enlightenment by initiating artistic and aesthetic investigations.

Endnotes

1 The Battle of the Books is the name of a short novel written by Jonathan Swift and published in 1704. It depicts a literal battle between books in the King’s Library as ideas and artists struggle for supremacy. It has become a term for the Quaran of the Ancients and Moderns.


4 It is to be noted that these revolutions too were a result of previously conceived attitudes seeded in 17th century. It will be appropriate to say that there no boundaries can be drawn and modernity cannot be chronicled exactly on the timeline of history. The development in civilizations, be these ancient or modern are the result of continuous but small steps forward.


6 For ideas on nationalism as it prevailed during the time under discussion see Rubindranath, Tagore. Nationalism. India: Pongali Adab, 2010.


9 It was really the manifestation of a vague desire on the part of those of us who participated in it to get back to some kind of order. We were trying to move in a direction opposite to Impressionism. That was a reason we abandoned color, emotions, sensations and everything that has been introduced by the Impressionists, to search again for an archetypical basis in the compositions, trying to make an order of it. Dore Ashton. Impressions at the art. London: Thames & Hudson, 1972. 59.


From the Curator’s desk

What is the project about?

The show while measuring the temporality of the terms tradition and modern re-interprets the relationship between arts and crafts in contemporary Pakistan- arts being the exemplification of modern and crafts as an illustration of tradition. The bifurcation between the two forms of creativity, in this case, is conjectured to be a colonial construct. In an effort to establish the cultural supremacy over their subject or simply misjudging the aesthetic concerns of indigenous artists, the British rejected our age-old artistic traditions and considered them to be more skill-oriented and less conceptually driven. Hence, they imposed their ideals of modernity onto us. Be it in terms of medium, form or content Western standards were set to be followed in order to be truly modern. These borrowed epiphanies of modernity left us wandering in the following epoch of post-colonialism and post-modernism. More recently, the dawn of the 21st century compelled the artists to address the identity crisis in an age of globalization and technology. Furthermore, to understand the complex social and cultural issues and realities artists have started probing into the traditional practices.

In our context, as explained above, this exhibition connects the cords with our actual foundations enabling the artists to make informed decisions towards the renaissance of modern.

Context to the exhibit

The journey of measuring the progression from traditional to modern becomes easier through conventional mediums and conformist aesthetics. As ideas like ‘art for art sake’ and art as an ‘individual expression’ recede, more artists focus on the longstanding function of art as an object of beauty and or truth. Artists concentrate on acquiring skills through repetitive exercises in pursuit of this truth. They have also once again started relying on the practices of the ateliers. Such art becomes a collective expression of a group of people within a society which enhances the role, functionality as well as utilitarian value of art object itself. The eclectic rummaging through symbolism, mythology, metaphor and ethnic which is parallel to ‘conceptual dilemas’ results in creating pieces that are influenced by craft as well as art and design such is the way ahead towards a harmonious progression from tradition to modern.
Significance of the shortlisted artists and specific artistic practices

In our tradition, art has also been associated with the ideas of preciousness, adornment as well as utility. Henceforth, decoration, embellishment, and surface design have been the essential part of the overall scheme of making be it painting or sculpture. This personalization and enhancement were often conceived in terms of jewelry, textiles, ceramics, building crafts, etc., enabling these mediums as complete genres of artistic expression. Artists in this show belong to diverse backgrounds and creative disciplines. However, they choose conventional mediums of book painting, naqsh, jewelry, weaving, embroidery, ceramics, wood carving, stone carving, and inlay to make the inquiry into modernity through traditional practices.

How will the viewers experience the work?

Viewers will be introduced to the rich traditional practices of art and crafts in our region. They will also experience that the conventional use of mediums, adornment, and propriety can at the same time encounter the thrust of modernity in positions of conceptual concerns.

THE EIGHTH GARDEN

Mehwish Abid in conversation with Sadia Pasha Kamran

MA: What does The Eighth Garden stand for?

SPK: It is a utopian space that one desires to be in, a safe haven for the practitioners of conventional arts and crafts. Though the title definitively has a religious connotation but I will be discussing it as a cultural practitioner, art historian and a humble thinker for whom religion remains as one of the most important driving forces in life.

The notion of seven gardens or seven heavens is present in many religions that are planned by Almighty. The Eighth Garden is an organic consequence. It is anticipated as the above which forms itself amongst the other planned innovations.

MA: What religious inferences are you talking about?

SPK: The visual imagery of a garden is almost always derived from sacred scripture. In Quran, the word Garden is often used for Heaven and is described as a place of abundance, luminous and white. It is usually paired with the idea of hell which is dark, red and fiery. Furthermore, the idea of a garden is narrated by the seren which lists down amenities like brocade, silverware, fruits, milk, honey & sweet waters. Thus, the idea of a garden is sensory in character. It is moreover very socially driven whom we will meet and what we will attain etc. It is as a place of cosmic perfection for a believer.

MA: Garden is also associated with the idea of the afterlife, have you thought about that aspect?

SPK: In a way, yes. See, the afterlife is about changing physical form and growing into what we do not know of. Similarly, in The Eighth Garden and in art generally, objects may transform from one state of existence to another.

MA: How do you relate to the idea of the garden with your concerns about tradition and modern art?

SPK: Garden is an ever-changing entity, plants grow, yield flowers and fruits. They will and die and the garden gets barren. Similarly, art practices are adopted, they are appropriated they become tradition only to be replaced by the new and the novel; the modern.

MA: How pertinent is the debate of tradition and modern in contemporary times?

SPK: It is very relevant. We are now moving from global to local. These ideas of inclusiveness have brought up the issues of identity which compel us to probe the foundations and the traditions. Secondly, in our case and in the absence of written history and critique on art, I find the terminology of art history and art theory quite problematic. We borrow the terminology from Western art history which itself finds several terms and ideas outdated. Then a lot of issues arise during translations. Even the style of writing history changes over time and space. If we have to accommodate the demanding world of art history we will end up introducing terms like traditionally modern, modern contemporary or traditionally conceptual.
As history is not about the past rather how the past is perceived by someone in a certain time period, it will depend on the person – not only writing but reading it too. I have chosen to deliberate on the notions of tradition and modern so it could be theorized in the contemporary scenario rather than looking back at how past defined and coined these terms.

MA. You are talking about the tussle between the art and craft, elaborate on this?
SPK. Yes, the division between the two expressions of creativity, in our region, happened somewhere during the 19th century. The British in order to establish their supremacy over the locals rejected the age-old indigenous practices of artmaking or they simply misjudged these practices due to the varying aesthetic concerns between the East and the West. In the West, aesthetic theories were penned down under the larger umbrella of philosophy while in the East these theories were reflected and recorded in terms of holy scripture, poetry and even in the court proceeding e.g. An- Albari. It would be unjust to say that the marvels of art that come in the form of book art, architecture, textile, jewelry, carpets, etc. had no conceptual and theoretical streams attached to them. So, when the British implied that ‘India has no art to teach its people’ and thus there is no need to set up art schools rather Mayo School (Lahore) focused on craft-oriented studies, they were being biased. They planted this seed of conflict and nurtured anxiety between the practitioners deprecating the craft as a mere skill or a medium.

MA. How would you define medium and concept?
SPK. The function of the medium in art is mediation. It presumably transmits the content of an artwork to its receiver. Thus, the role of the medium is instrumental firstly in engaging the viewer and secondly in communicating the concept, while the concept is the idear or the message. During the early 20th century, thinkers like R.G. Collingwood made claims that art is purely an imaginary object that exists in the artist’s mind. It lends the idea that conception is art and execution is skill or craft.

MA. What is the premise that this exhibition sets for tradition and modern in the Pakistani context?
SPK. As art can be a collective expression of society, the artists in this group derive their inspiration from current socio-political affairs and concerns but the medium is indigenous-traditional-familiar-conventional amongst all the artificial intelligence, foreign invasions in terms of materials, as well as ideas, etc. One feels comfortable with what is familiar. Hence, conventional forms of artmaking make an easy connection with the audience or at least have a larger audience. But at the same time tradition can’t be recognized unless the idea of modern is there. In ‘modern’ the ‘tradition’ is always present. So, they are not two separate entities rather sequential. Ultimately, it’s about the fluidity of time and space. We can say that what is new and novel today over a period of time may become traditional.

MA. What inspired you to have this diverse range of artists in your exhibit?
SPK. We have a rich tradition of art-making that involves the use of diverse mediums. I have tried to pick up the artists who are working in these indigenous mediums, for which our region is known for. For example, Nasra Latif Qureshi and Usman Saeed both experiment with the traditional technique of miniature painting. While keeping the essence of the traditional Indo-Persian style of book painting alive, one deconstructs the forms only to reconstruct it and weaves the narrative around the colonial discrepancies. The other highlights the multiperspective characteristic of it by entrapping the viewer further into the picture space. Similarly, Sania Samad chooses the art of embellishing fabric reminiscing her childhood routine of storytelling or family chit chat while embroidering clothes. Her repetitive imagery/motifs onto the national flag are not only therapeutic but politically charged at the same time. Riham Syed also incorporates the colonial critique through ralli work, Humaira Abid’s wood carvings bring the celebrated building and furniture craft to the mainstream debate on and about women issues. Other selected artists also, are connecting conventional mediums and practices to contemporary aesthetic concerns.

MA. What are the indigenous techniques that the visitor of the exhibit shall be introduced to?
SPK. The exhibition showcases indigenous techniques such as kandakari, fijani, ralli, zarari, parchinkari, nagasi, kashiari, weaving, embroidery, wood carving, stone carving and other arts of the book.

MA. What is the essence of the scheme of display?
SPK. I would say, I did try to keep the essence similar to the hypothesized and imagined Eighth Garden. It is natural but not wild because when you plant a garden, you plan it, tend it and weed it that’s what we have done.
This Craft of Art
By Quddus Mirza

In the world of visual production, there has been a discussion, debate and disagreement regarding art and craft. Though relatively recent; because before the Industrial Revolution and the Age of Modernity, there was hardly a difference between an artist and a craftsman. Both performed for a patron, both relied on tradition, both employed conventional formats to meet the demands of their milieu. In that sense, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo could not have been distant from Benvenuto Cellini, the goldsmith of the Renaissance period.

Because the two worked with hands, and both produced singular objects for private or public consumption, but with the Industrial Revolution, when items were produced – and reproduced, mechanically and for a large number of consumers, the distance between artist and craftsman starts becoming more obvious, unbearable and unreachable. It was believed that craftsmen makes an artefact on the basis of an age-old formula, whereas artist invents and introduces new elements in his artwork. Hence the difference of hierarchy between an artist and an artisan.

Artists, since the dawn of modernism have enjoyed this privileged and prestigious position, till the arrival of postmodernism, an era which determined that all visual production, no matter what material, medium, method, scale or usage could be classified as ‘art’. The hard lines between disciplines diminished, thus it was difficult to retain the exclusive stature of ‘artist’ away from the class of ‘craftsman’.

However, in cultures like ours, which received modernity and industrialization as second-hand concept/phenomenon, there is a minimum difference or discrimination, especially in a feudal and agrarian society, where anyone who works with hand is considered to be performing menial job, thus called ‘Kammi’, whereas if you earn through the labor of others, you are an elite, a landlord, member of a respected class. This attitude and approached infiltrated into art, thus the use of labor, manual skill, past forms are all that our modern artist struggled against with, but eventually they had to bow down to it.

Because of an environment that is inclusive rather than segregating, Canadian art critic Thomas McEvilley defines India (or the South Asia) as being Postmodern before the term Postmodernism was coined, because of its diversity of creative expressions. Sadia Pasha Kamran is also investigating the boundaries between art and craft, especially for the exhibition ‘The Eighth Garden’, curated by her, in which a number of artists were invited to showcase works, which exist in the purgatorial place in-between art and craft. The exhibition is an attempt to question the demarcation between disciplines and genres of creative expressions, and not only in the display spaces, but inside the pages of a dictionary as well as in the mind-set of those who traverse between different formats of cultural products.
The exhibitions at the National Art Gallery, Islamabad for IAF '91 and LIP Q2, prove to be a stance towards the disparities of art and craft, or a meeting ground for the two. In the exhibition, artists appeared to be utilizing multiple means to fabricate their ideas into tangible images. Collaborating with local craftsmen, like Sania Samad, yet expressing and commenting on larger issues of politics, identity and nationhood. Due to the subject matter, material and technique, Samad’s work incorporates the language of popular art, a vocabulary that was easily understood, but was hardly admitted into the sanctity of high art, until the movement of popular art began in the art of Pakistan, during the early 90s in Karachi. heart Mahal, the joint project of four artists (David Alersworth, Duniya Kadi, Ifikhar Dadi, Elizabeth Bad) led to the acceptance, assimilation and appropriation of popular pictorial practices, mainly transport art, cinema painting and recycled items. Following them a whole new generation became interested in and intrigued by the ‘popular art’, which, due to its functional aspect, could be classified craft too.

A number of other artists, including Risham Syed, Masooma Syed, Noora Latif Qureshi, Humaira Abid, Sameen Agha weave in their works, the sensibility that is shared, prepared and utilized in the public hemisphere. Whether these are mechanically reproduced images of urban views dominated by commercial hoardings, or jewelry pieces that trespass between sculpture and ornamentation, or replicas of items for ordinary usage such as shoes, dresses and other accessories in wood, or miniature models of construction sites – all certify a new order of things in the realm of aesthetics. Here much loved, well regarded and constantly guarded notions of originality, authenticity, avant-garde, kitsch, functional, decorative, handmade, machine manufactured, are questioned and challenged. Sadia Pasha Kamran offers the ground for all these discussions, discourses and disputes to unfold in front of us, in the form of art, which is more than art – anyway.

Stretching the Definition
By Asim Akhtar

‘Art came from craft. And we forget it at our peril.’ So stated Breon O’Casey, whose work proves just how inextricably the two are integrated.

The artists’ re-enactments for The Eighth Garden operate at the intersections between craft, fine art and conceptual art. The major contribution of this exhibition was in the blurring of boundaries, be they modes of display, process, materials, production, presentation or documentation. By bridging the tired hierarchies of fine and applied arts, the exhibition tapped into a larger movement encompassing independent craft, art, and design. While celebrating process-oriented work, the exhibition also explored assumptions about it, chiefly that craft busies the hands while emptying the mind into a quiet meditative state. Certainly, the labour-intensive objects on view skillfully call on traditional craft materials like terra cotta, fibers, etc. Yet, this work is as much conceptual art as craft, with the material at the service of ideas, raising questions about the body, politics, labour, economics, and identity.

We are in danger of losing our sense of the natural order of things in our organic world. Perhaps, we already have, but the current exhibition curated by Sadia Pasha Kamran, in its unreality, refocuses our minds and our eyes on the beauties and horrors of reality. Symbols are important. Prophecies too. The Hopi Indian word koyamalqapiti encompasses an essence or a state of being. Hopi cosmology perceives the present to be the manifestation of the ‘Fourth World’. At the beginning of time seven worlds were created. The first three worlds were each destroyed due to the divergence of human beings from an ordained, sacred path that connected them to concepts and practices of love and respect for all life on Earth.

Khaleeq Ur Rehman’s theme may not be significant, but to see it threaded through different media makes for a fascinating work, not least because it reveals the primary role of process and material – of craft – in his work. It is via materials and their peculiar methodologies that his images are born, evolve and acquire their peculiar ‘rightness’ and independence. The untitled work carved out of pink marble seems to favour simple methods. The resulting sculpture is a concise shape with a gritty, fluid texture that courses through it like livelihood. In his work, the artist acknowledges the symbolic and devotional roots of art.

Beautiful, mathematically precise designs abound in Muhammad Asif Sharif’s ceramic artifacts. The work’s primary aim is to bring the artifact into conversation with ornamentation. Elemental design is carefully balanced by cultural observation. Ceramics, Sharif’s privileged medium, conjures notions of ornamentation and preciousness on the one hand, and utilitarianism and function on the other. This medium is especially well-suited to address questions such as: Does form trump function, and does art trump craft?
THE EIGHTH GARDEN

Given his interest in utopian structures and the struggle between planning and speculation in the development of modernist ideals and aesthetics, Shuja ul Haq drafts narrative of urban development and the built environment and its impact on an individual’s experience. His architectural plan forms the foundation for the layered composition. Using concrete and the metal wire, he investigates the physical site and less literal structures where social, economic, and political activity unfolds. Searching and discovering materials, their limits, powers and weaknesses, experimenting with colours and surfaces, details, attachments and systems. Mascomu Syed believes in transformation. Process-driven, she breaks down materials into components, and allow them to coalesce in new ways. Working with hands is a gesture of resistance against an industrialised society. In the face of rapid consumption and throwaway society, Syed’s work is designed to last over memory. She tries to remove her jewellery from the world of banality and excess, reinforcing its connection to the world of symbols and making it an act of magic.

Usman Saied shows an instinctive respect for nature which evokes an atmosphere of quiet, peaceful contemplation. The golden radiance of dawn seems through many layers of his past and returns to him the wonder he felt as a child in the early morning, bound unknowingly to the earth by the comforting contemplation of nature. His process of conceiving a work is linked with nature’s inherent structures and their ability to strike a deep resonance within the artist’s memory. The little world of his garden in the middle of the city becomes the starting point for the reconstruction, through colour, of fleeting but profound sensations.

Sadia Pasha Kamran’s work is about materials, but not that alone. It moves beyond exploration and elementary substitution and into material complexity – a saturation of ingredients infused with semantic potential. A gentle dismissal of boundaries is present, but this is no irreverent snub of the past or effort to redirect the future in a subversive manner. There is still an obvious embrace of refinement and craft. Immateriality, potential, location, and connectivity become critically interwoven into meta-concepts of the body and its adornment.

Artists have long recognized that common objects, when stood upon their heads through the medium of art, may spark epiphanies about aspects of function and meaning that pass unnoticed under ordinary circumstances. This kind of rhetorical inversion is fundamental to recent examples of Sadasivam’s work: a series of objects that possess physical attributes commonly associated with clocks, but which, in some cases, either misrepresent, or distort the clock by emphasizing the very things that it excludes. Among these features are anonymity, inadequacy, and doubt, the implications of which extend well beyond the context of time to interweave with the broader fabric of cultural identity.

The work of Savita Samad owes much of its sensibility to early 1970s glam: its artifice, excess, and attitude towards gender and identity. There is something nostalgic, ironic, and/or retro about the profusion of black cats pasted over the Pakistan flag – a mosaic-like wall work. The work’s obsessive surface seems earnestly drawn from some collision of nature, and fantasy in the service of pure theatre. The doll-like female army of free-roaming black cats is posed as if in spirited dance, alluring perhaps to the seven lives of a cat. The archetypal melded into one piece is a reflection on the human condition, and the artist’s self-identity as an immigrant woman living on the east coast, US, with all its potential and pathos.

By overcoming the dogmas of material-appropriateness, Dabi created power and a new basis for experimental work and formal innovation. The craft aspect that is so denigrated by present-day artists remains a natural part of his work – it is used with a purpose and not for its own sake. Dabi’s main subject is the human head. The process of building up, modelling, taking away, and adding is what matters. The making of abstraction, the work itself is the subject of his ceramic sculptures. The material does not serve certain purposes; it has its own value.

Knitting is the principle gesture of Faseeh Saleem’s technique. He works intuitively, even though resorting to a sketchbook, a model, and/or a preparatory drawing. Probing the divide between figuration and abstraction, he has fashioned an unusual, mysterious, sensual, and, at times, unseizingly grotesque form, commanding in its presence and scale. His ‘sculpture’ titled Embody is sustained by knowledge of traditional sculpture, folk art, modern design, and local crafts and textiles.

Risham Syed’s photographic tapestry poignantly evokes lives fragmented, thrown into disarray by haphazard construction. The image’s symmetries challenge the ways in which we structure our communities and integrate our surroundings. Set against the abrupt profusion of signboards and wall chalking, the resulting cityscape reveals the loss of environmental identity involved in the process of suburban development. The particulars of place have all been swept away; nothing remains but ring roads, cul-de-sacs and the Orange Line.

Humaina Abid’s formal language and choice of material show traces of past aesthetic eras, yet she isolates these references to design, architecture, or fashion from their original contexts and inserts them into a different semantic order. She arranges complex ensembles; ostensibly innocuous, they now subversively, now ironically gesture toward a more expansive signification above beneath their surfaces. In addition to art-historical and literary issues, her works interrogate political and social systems of power.
THE EIGHTH GARDEN

EPISODE II
Faseeh Saleem

Blurring the boundaries between art and fashion, the practice makes an inquiry into the ‘notion of beauty’. It also questions the human perception of the ideals of perfection. How does a mannequin become a perfect body reference in the construction of an article of clothing? During its making, the artwork involves both the presence and absence of the real physical human body. Old concepts of beauty need to be re-thought and tweaked, especially when represented in inanimate objects like mannequins.

Embody focuses on the interaction of textiles with body, movement and space. This piece makes an artistic inquiry through knitted form into the ‘notion of feminine beauty’ and its conventional associations with an hourglass figure. The piece in this exhibit subverts, challenges and questions these assumptions.

Humaira Abid

Art always has the impulse to push boundaries—of traditional mediums, materials, and concepts—to create something entirely new. It draws from tradition and heritage and applies to contemporary themes and subject matter in the artwork. The practice involves everyday objects as symbols and presents them in unconventional ways to create new meanings. It expands on social issues and stereotypes, particularly taboos and overlooked issues. In addition, global perspective as an artist working in both Pakistan and the United States is insculpted, exploring themes from women’s lives that are rarely openly acknowledged: miscarriage, family, relationships, violence, and freedom.

The current exhibits are rooted in craft and technique. Tools are created and techniques are developed to bring a woman’s voice and point of view to this male-dominated medium.
Khaleeq Ur Rehman

The art piece got intrigued by Gandhara sculptures. The tradition of stone carving reflects and celebrates the historical Buddhist era in the past. The techniques of Gandhara Sculptures are used for the contemporary narrative. It entertain the question regarding the relevance of the technique in contemporary art scene and inquiries whether it is worth representing today’s perspective or not? It explores the Gandhara tradition of stone carving to find a common and contemporary ground of expression for ideas, through a process of looking at the past and present, together from a common perspective and through a process of deconstruction and creative efforts.

Masooma Syed

Art is an affair with materials, surfaces and their inherent metaphors. Making a piece of jewelry is a personal expression, that sways between the sensuous and the erotic, desire and defiance. It alters the meaning of adornment, the precious and the powerful, permanence and the ephemeral, the expensive and the inexpensive, the romantic and the rebellious. The suggestive aesthetics, reminiscent of the orient myths of ‘the gaze’ reinforce the importance of suggestibility as the primary dimension of an aesthetic sensibility and the strong visceral meaning embedded in the use of natural materials of everyday life. The practice tries to fulfill the urge to push the boundaries of jewelry making from the subject of ornamentation to the politics of body and society, that has always been pertinent to South Asia where many taboos still exist around body and many forms of its ornamentation.
Muhammad Asif Sharif

The practice deals, firstly, with fundamental issues relating to the function and meaning of art in the contemporary world and, secondly, with the identity crisis prevailing in the age of globalization. E.H. Gombrich, in the book Art and Illusion, says that authentic art is limited by certain taboos independent of the person carrying it out whereas the distanced version has no need to care about those taboos. The works in terracotta are reflections through naqash and exemplify the expression of a human being with all of his or her subjective qualities as a product of the present.

Nusra Latif Qureshi

“This book first arose out of a passage in Jorge Luis Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought—our thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterward to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. This passage quotes a ‘certain Chinese encyclopedia’ in which it is written that ‘animals are divided into (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) cunning, (e) fierce, (f) xylophagous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies’. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehended in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that.”

Michel Foucault

There is a place for everything in a well-sorted culture but the surplus of material and emotion is floundering about like noxious debris in immediate surroundings. These paintings deal with this chaotic environment and the resulting confusion. There is, of course, the futile attempt to order visual images, and this futility is admitted. The title refers obliquely to the stagnant nature of certain ideas that have crippled modern societies i.e. the dogmatic interpretation of religion and dissection of faith.

Nusra Latif Qureshi

“The Eighth Garden

The Biological Remains of an Eighteenth-Century Sampler
ink on illustration board
2014
Risham Syed

The practice relies on photographic images, found objects, textiles, patterns, margins, borders and frames. The concern broadly remains in the tradition of using textiles as an artistic expression and its contextualization in the today through the choice of images. The works in the current show are from the series titled ‘We are very Sorry for this Transient Inconvenience’ (2012). The jacquard loom was the first mechanization of the handloom in the early 19th century. Traditionally, European jacquard landscapes gave a pretty picture of country life. Ironically, Lahore currently is a city dug up in the name of development and modernization. These jacquard tapestries have been woven by the Chinese, having taken the jacquard loom, a step further and attaching it to modern technology and digital age.

Sadia Pasha Kamran

Art questions the established norms of creativity and its expression be it in terms of the form, content or the medium. Such interrogations, in the broader scope, were the basis of the individual as well as societal progression. Choices that were made and decisions that were taken, over a period of time, became recognized in social conventions and cultural expectations only to be examined again. The Birds of Heaven series studies the bird form and various connotations attached to it in the complex visual culture of the globalised art of today’s Pakistan.

Enchanted by the birds of Kashmir—Heaven on earth, Emperor Jahangir asked the court painter, Ustad Mansur, to capture the colors and forms of these birds. The pendants crafted in the Kundan technique are dedicated to Jahangir’s interest in flora and fauna of Kashmir and the skill and observation of the master painter.
Sadqain

The surrounding environment, be it material or immaterial, determines the existential mode of being by means of perception of a particular situation and reaction to it. In the said process, preconceived notions and feelings towards specific objects or state, time and movement redirect the subjective reality. It is this reality that is the quest of the practice. The practice also aims to explore various associations that the body had with another body. It includes the connotations of affinity, revulsion, aggression and/or submission.

The artwork in this show explores the meanings associated with the gestural movements of the body. The gestures are replicas of the human body investigating emotions. It also explores multifiled erosion; gestural movements and the tension that exists in the contact of two surfaces.

Sameen Agha

The practice experiments working with diverse construction materials e.g. wood or marble. Employing the metaphor of home as a place of belonging and rudiment, it has been questioning the human body in non-representative ways. However, the body itself communicates the traumas, memories, experiences, and progressions. As the practice gradually evolves exploring new mediums and materials to communicate, the current work is part of a series that explores marble signifying skin and body. It is an investigation and then communication of the past traumas and how the connotation of home has changed over time.

Untitled
Marble
2019

Home is a terrible place to Love
Marble & graphite on paper
2020
Sania Samad

For an immigrant, Art as a practice roots itself on the ideas of exploring and comparing rituals and viewpoints between cultures-native and the embraced, Pakistan and the United States in this case. Varying norms between these two places not only intrigue the visual imagery but its perception too where ‘the personal becomes the political’ or ‘universal’. Moreover, the role and status of women in joint family system in Pakistan rationalize concepts of feminism and the issues of identity which are quite different in the States. The work in the exhibit is much informed by the childhood memories and an urge to re-live them. Thus, the rituals around cutting and embroidering the patterns on fabric as a comprehensive ceremony become precious. Learning the skill from female members of the family, witnessing storytelling while embroidering and realizing the value of a well-told story: hence, values the stories held in objects.

Shehzad Ali

Present always relies on the past for its foundation. The possibility of the former influencing the later is rather undeniable. Similarly, art draws from tradition as an essential component which is tried and tested and is passed on to the next generation. Architectural ornamentation, stucco moldings, cinema boards, murals and colossal relief sculptures serve as a stimulus for the practice. Odds and Ends, in The Eighth Garden, is a reminiscence of childhood experiences of a family trade that provide visual vocabulary as well as artistic manifestation to the thoughts and feelings of an artist son tutored by a classified ustad and father.

I Belong to No Land-I
Silk Thread & Beads on Velvet
2018

Odds & Ends
Gypsum Plaster
2020
Shuja ul Haq

Art is an investigation of a visual connection between man and the tangible or intangible surroundings that nature has webbed around man. Thus, the practice revolves around the knowledge of forms (tangible) that symbolize silence and stillness or loss and bereavement (intangible). The artworks in the current show explore the idea of ‘experiencing’ lifelessness. These post-war, abandoned and destroyed structures draw on the fascination of making spaces and transforming them into a metaphor of past and present, a dialogue between states and amongst time and space.

Talat Dabir

The practice spans over four decades. It tries to instill natural phenomena in the artworks. Besides human figures, birds, wind, marine life, and water feature is regularly explored in the practice. Clay, a flexible medium, allows the experimentation to explore unconscious, free association ranging from amorphous to more clearly recognizable forms.

Art is a spontaneous act rather than a calculated one. The subject in this work, the human form, is one of the most traditional forms in art history, but it tries to subvert the inherent clichés associated with the genre, redefining sculpture. With their earthly and unfinished look, the sculptures unvel a tension between thought and process, henceforth, creating a distinctive and new sculptural mode.

Silent Stories
Iron, Sand & Cement
2020

Untitled
Terracotta
2017
Usman Saeed

The practice focuses on subjects that root from nature. The current work in response to the curatorial note for the exhibit The Eighth Garden studies the notions of light and flight in relation to trees and birds. This piece is a manifestation of the cyclical movements of nature; rain, flora, fauna, sea, and earth.

Gardenfruits Vol V Detail
Watercolour and ink on paper
2019