Threshold Spaces The Body is Present

Curated by Zohreen Murtaza

This exhibition brings together a repertoire of dynamic works by pioneering women artists who started practicing between the 1950s and late 1970s, in dialogue with the works of more contemporary and emerging artists who have followed suit afterwards.

Metaphor, Similie, archetypal symbol came to characterize many works produced during and immediately after the end of the dictatorship of the 80s but in the decades that have followed women artists have pushed and transcended the boundaries of these cautious overtures that were then transformed into whimsical visual vocabularies.

"Threshold Spaces: The Body is Present" is an attempt to trace the trajectory of subject matter and iconography conceived by women artists that was borne as a result of political upheavals which contested the question of a woman's place in society.

The exhibition adopts a thematic approach that explores visual vocabulary and archetypal symbols present in the works of women artists, therefore it is divided into sections titled "Land and Body", "Homescapes", "Dreamscapes", "Moonscapes", "Birdscapes" and "Hybrid Bodies."

If the body is to "be regarded as a kind of hinge or threshold" placed between a psychic and more sociopolitical presence then how have female artists reckoned with the discursive formations so far that have fired their imagination? How have their visual vocabularies transformed? Is this threshold a liminal space, a barrier, a catalyst or a productive conduit?

Participating Artists

	Adeela Suleman	Maria Khan
Anna Molka Ahmad		Marium Agha
Anwar Afzal	Ammara Jabbar	Maryam Bani Asadi
Esmat Rahim	Amra Khan	Marjan Bani Asadi
Humaira Ejaz	Anushka Rustomji	
Meher Afroz	Ayesha Khalid	Mina Mohsin
Nahid Raza	Bushra Waqas Khan	Naiza Khan
Salima Hashmi	Farida Batool	Natasha Malik
	Donia Qaiser	Natasha Jozi
	Dua Abbas Rizvi	Nilofer Akmut
	Eesha Sohail	Pak Khawateen Painting Club
	Farazeh Syed	Rabia S. Akhtar
	Fiza Khatri	Ruby Chishti
	Hamra Abbas	Rahat Naveed Masud
	Haya Zaidi	Sadia Hussain Syed
	Heraa Khan	Sadaf Naeem
	Hoor Imad Sherpao	Sahyr Syed
	Khadija Rehman	Sana Arjumand

Sarah Mumtaz

Wardah Shabbir

Masooma Syed

Context and Background

In the post 1977/military coup scenario, politics and society became inextricably linked with art. Mass media and literature were censored, regulated and controlled by the regime. Acceptable dress code, behaviour and language was quickly imposed. Pakistani women artists in the 70s had to formulate new artistic strategies in order to assert their agency. If the period between the 1950s and early 70s constituted a time when women artists struggled to establish themselves as art practitioners and art teachers, in the late 70s they had to contend with a whole new set of challenges.

As Pakistani women stepped into the public space to confront the Regime and its policies, they had already reconstituted their relationship with the State. There was a vehement disavowal of the frameworks that had sought to contain and regulate them and the discontent spilled out into public space. The female body in this scenario can be envisaged as the surface on which social law, morality, values could be inscribed but apart from bodily experience rooted in exteriority, it is equally emblematic of a more psychic inscription; one that consists of a lived interiority. These are characterized by the manipulation of anatomy, imaginary anatomy and a phenomenological experience. In light of the turbulent time that they were witnessing, the works produced by Pakistani women artists at this time fall within the ambit of both these conceptions of the body.

In a sense, construction of such alternative imagery by Pakistani women artists had already commenced in the 1950s given that women artists had to contend with the social realities of being mothers, daughter, wives along with practicing art and so struggled with the crisis of multiple identities. The post 1977/military coup accelerated this process where women emerged as active agents of change, asserting their presence and calling for a rewriting of regressive and hegemonic institutional structures. Therefore both bodily and lived experiences thrive in the works of Pakistani women artists albeit within the bounds of a distinct vocabulary. The representation of the female body at this time overlaps, shifts, morphs and

gravitates between both these realms of public/private, inside/outside, fantasy/reality, active/passive.

Since then Pakistani women artists have continued to problematize these binaries. Metaphor, Similie, archetypal symbols had been a characteristic of many works produced during and immediately after the Regime ended but in the decades that have followed women artists have pushed and transcended the boundaries of these cautious overtures that were then transformed into whimsical visual vocabularies. These subjectivities may have been wrought out of fear, despair and repression but the rallying cry in many of these works is that of an emergent and deep-seated defiance; it is a consciousness of their self that is almost palpable, visceral and intense. Women artists today continue to tackle the same conundrums but in response to the social and cultural milieu of their time.

This exhibition brings specific works of pioneering women artists who started practicing between the 1950s and 1970s, in dialogue with the works of more contemporary and emerging artists who have followed afterwards, in an attempt to trace the trajectory of subject matter and iconography conceived by women artists since then. Artists such as Salima Hashmi, Meher Afroz, Nahid Raza and Riffat Alvi were witness to the repercussions of successive military coups and political upheaval that followed; can a consciousness of this tumultuous past and its many facets be gleaned from their works as one begins to sift through their distinct styles and content?

In architecture a threshhold can refer to a means of connecting two rooms and spaces. These spaces can be so varied, nuanced that they have the potential to emerge not just as passages or barriers but as settings that have their own character. Theories in Education talk about threshold concepts that lead to new conceptual understanding; therefore thresholds are also akin to transformative portals. They induce radical action and embrace change. In light of this discourse, rather than a standard chronological display this exhibition on art by women artists is a call to investigate, recognize and embrace the presence of such a threshold space that exists between the various pasts and present.

The exhibition adopts a thematic approach that explores visual vocabulary and archetypal symbols present in the works of women artists, therefore it is divided into sections titled "Land and Body", "Homescapes", "Dreamscapes", "Moonscapes", "Birdscapes" and "Hybrid Bodies." Works by woman artists from the 50s to 70s share space with works of young, emerging and established practitioners.

If the body is to "be regarded as a kind of hinge or threshold" placed between a psychic and more sociopolitical presence then how have female artists reckoned with the discursive formations that have fired their imagination? How have their visual vocabularies transformed? Is this threshold a liminal space, a barrier, a catalyst or a productive conduit?

Women artists in the late 70s and 80s in particular transformed their practices into subversive, radical and even transgressive statements about womanhood. Their legacy encompasses both repression in tandem with a sense of liberation as they broke new ground: how do Pakistani women artists now build on those iconographies and complex visual vocabulariesnew thresholds- in relation to gender, agency, emotion, societal entrapment as they shift between multiple identities in a different world?

Credits

Clifton Art Gallery, 2022. http://cliftonartgallery.com/artist/nahid-raza/.

Elizabeth Grosz, Space, Time, And Perversion Essays On The Politics Of Bodies (Great Britain: Routledge, 1995).

Geeti Sen, Feminine Fables (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2002).

Marjorie Hussain, 'The Sun Blazes the Colours Through My Window' Anna Molka Ahmed (Research and Publication Center National College of Arts, Lahore, 2007).

Niilofur Farrukh, ed. A Beautiful Despair—The Art And Life Of Meher Afroz (Lahore: Le Tropical, 2020).

Rosalind Jones, "Writing The Body Toward An Understanding Of L' Ecriture Feminine", in The New Feminist Criticism Essays On Women, Literature, Theory (repr., New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 366.

Salima Hashmi, Unveiling The Visible (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2003).

Sandra Frydrysiak, "The Representation of the Female Body in the Feminist Art as Body Politics",n.d.308.

Land and Body

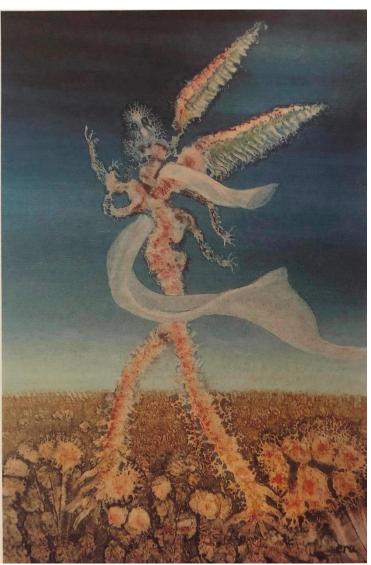
These works draw a connection between land and body in a manner that not only broadly establishes feminine connotations with nature but uses these metaphors to actively engage with patriarchy, difference, surveillance and violence. Women artists through the 50s to late 70s engaged with social realities and inequities using nature related symbols. The iconography of artists that have followed features, trees, water, earth and land but the subject matter has diversified. From disorientating dream imagery that imagines alternate worlds to questioning post-colonial hierarchies, ecologies and environments these works contest the regulation of daily life and emphasize that it not be mediated by men and their masculinist notions of geography, territory.



Mother Earth Esmat Rahim Oil on board 60x 48.5 cm. 1961-62 Coll. S. Rahim

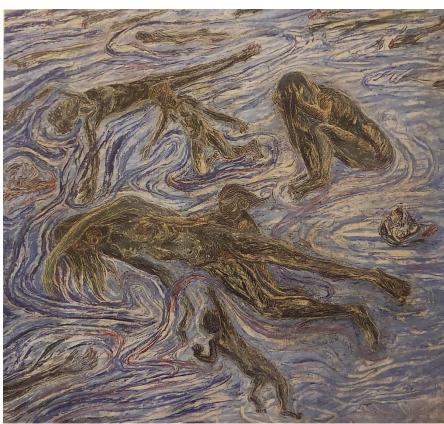


Burnt House, Murree Anwar Afzal Oil on Board 62 x 36 cm 1948-49 Coll: Alhamra Gallery





Coll: S. Rahim



Flood
Anna Molka Ahmed
Oil on Canvas
88x82cm
Coll: Z. David

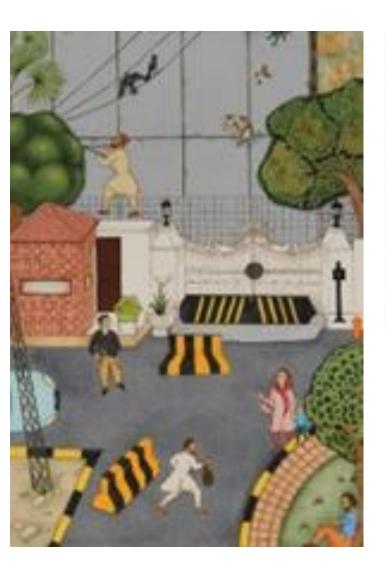


Tell the Wolves I am Home

Marium Agha Yarn on re-constructed tapestry 1320 x 52.5 inches 2018



Under the Apple Tree Farazeh Syed Collage & Mixed Media 22 in x 16 inches 2019



On the Way Home Maryam Bani Asadi Gouache on Wasli n.d



Leisure Time in Lahore Maryam Bani Asadi Gouache on Wasli 14 x 19 cm 2016



An Ordinary Day Marjan Bani Asadi Oil on Canvas n.d



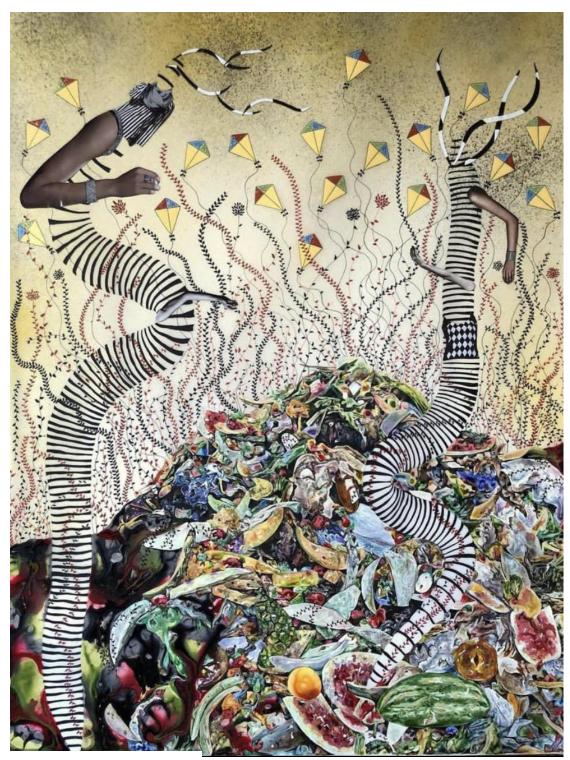
Stormy Tulips
Alia Bilgrami
Triptych, Gouache and Watercolour on
Wasli
13.5 x 18.5cm each
2017



After Anahita- Cosmic consonance
Anushka Rustomji
Acrylic, ink and graphite
on fired terracotta earthenware
2022



Closeup of After Anahita- Cosmic consonance Anushka Rustomji Acrylic, ink and graphite on fired terracotta earthenware 2022



Dawn of Hope Haya Zaidi Ink, Acrylic, collage, glitter and spray paint on polyester film 35x24 inches

2019



The Original Sinner
Natasha Malik
Etching on Paper (Edition 1/5)
11x15 inches
2021



On the Frontline Naiza Khan 2016



Saat Darya ke paani se dhuli meri rooh
phir bhi rahi gadli
(My soul washed after the water of seven seas still remain muddy)
Natasha Iqbal Jozi
Still from Performance Duration: 12 mins, 20 secs
2019



Barseen Camp, Dasu Dam, Kohistan, Pakistan
Laser Print on Paper
13.6 x 19.2 inches

2020



Pak Khawateen Exploring
Petroglyphs Near Diamer Bhasha
Dam Site
Laser Print on Paper
13.6 x 19.2 inches
2020

Homescapes

The private space of a home vis a vis the world outside can embody the inner and outer psychic states of women. The feminine body and its emotions are represented through metaphor and composition in Nahid Raza's paintings. Order and social mores are enforced using designed and regulated spaces, on the contrary it is iconography that tracks the conflict of emotions. Fuelled by a politicization of religion that sought to enforce the *Chaadar and Chaar Deewari* in the 80s, these demure but dark transgressions are replaced with rebellion as women contest social boundaries i.e they step out into public spaces to reclaim their place and confront the State head-on.

This selection of works situates female bodies in the domesticated, gendered space of their home decades after they had "stepped out" i.e transgressed boundaries defined by the State and society. It is in the comfort of the" inner world" of the home where the morality, conduct and speech of women is governed. A home is where the embodiment of the ideal family is constructed so that women can be worshipped but also castigated. It is also complicated by the fact that historically, the trope of the mother, widow, wife and even whore was conceived and represented here. Since the 70s and 80s how have women navigated between social mores and desire, the "inside" and "outside"? These works embody the socio-psychic spaces where women painters can spurn boundaries, redirect the Gaze and use metaphor in whimsical ways to break the glass ceiling. Moreover the archetypal and poetic iconography of the rose, fish and even flesh is transformed: the intent of this familiar vocabulary is to unsettle, seduce, scandalize and spurn.



Nahid Raza Woman Series Oil on Canvas 30 x 30



Untitle

Nahid Raza

Woman Series

Oil on Canvas

36x48



Nahid Raza Woman series Oil on Canvas 24 x 36



Untitled Nahid Raza Woman Series Oil on Canvas 24x30



Untitled

Nahid Raza

Woman Series

Oil on Canvas



Ayesha Khalid Gouache and Gold Leaf on Wasli 38.3 x 31.3 cm 2011



Obscure II
Sadaf Naeem
Oil on Canvas
36X48 inches
2013



Waiting
Sadaf Naeem
Oil on Canvas
36x36 inches
In private collection
2015



The Cozy Cottage

Risham Syed

diptych, each panel 60" x 60"

panel 1: cross stitch in wool on canvas.

panel 2: plastic grass on board.

2007



Where is home?
Sahyr Syed
Mixed media collage on archival

paper

2022



Hot Soup Ammara Jabbar video collage, animation 2021



Attire
Farazeh Syed
Acrylics on Canvas
4 x 5 ft.



Untitled Eesha Suhail Gouache on Wasli 18 x 18 inches 2021



Untitled
Mina Mohsin
Mixed media on Canvas
24 x 30 inches
2014

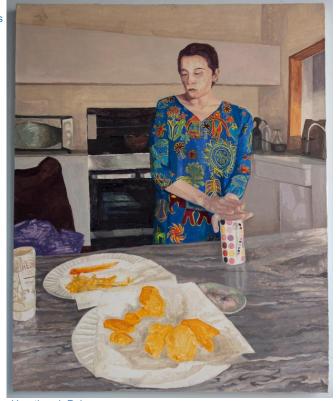


The Buccaneers
Dua Abbas
Gouache and pastel on archival
paper
30 x 44 inches
2018



Winner Winner Chicken Dinner

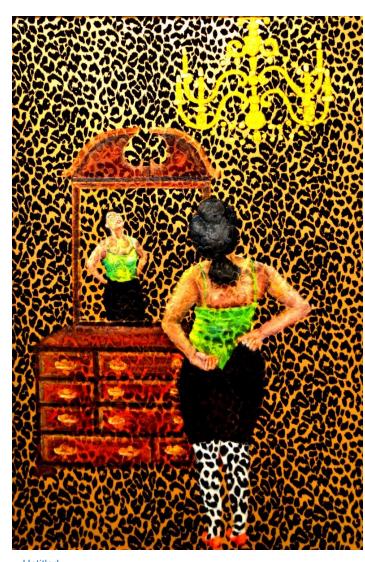
Mina Mohsin Acrylic on Canvas 60 x 60 inches 2019



Heartbreak Pakoras

Fiza Khatri 30 x 24

2020



Untitled
Mina Mohsin
Mixed media on
Faux Leather
30 x 24 inches
2014



Vertigo is the Desire

to Fall

Mina Mohsin

Oil and Acrylic on Canvas

96 x 96 inches

2013



Untitled Natasha Malik Gouache on Wasli 21 x 25 cm 2012



Natasha Malik
Digital print, Gouache and
Watercolour on Paper
28 x 41 cm
2016



Untitled Sahyr Syed Perforated paper 2020

Dreamscapes

"If women are to discover and express who they are to bring to the surface what masculine history has repressed in them, they must begin with their sexuality." ¹

The gul (flower) and roses in particular appear as a consistent motif in these works in relation to the female body. Rebellion, repression or union between lover and beloved: contemporary women artists had appropriated this motif to talk about social and political realities of their time. In the works of women artists that have followed, they enter alternate realms to question ageism, the Gaze and even art historical representation. All power structures that sideline and essentialize female representation are subverted and replaced by subject matter that is bold, brave, impudent and unapologetic.

"A long history of defining female sexuality as dangerous, hysteric and subordinate made feminist academics and activists focus on gender and sexuality." Perhaps these works contest these long held notions that sought to regulate and control bodies: the figures featured in these works know that they are being observed and assessed but never waver.

¹ Rosalind Jones, "Writing The Body Toward An Understanding Of L' Ecriture Feminine", in The New Feminist Criticism Essays On Women, Literature, Theory (repr., New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 366.

² Sandra Frydrysiak, "The Representation of the Female Body in the Feminist Art as Body Politics",n.d.308.



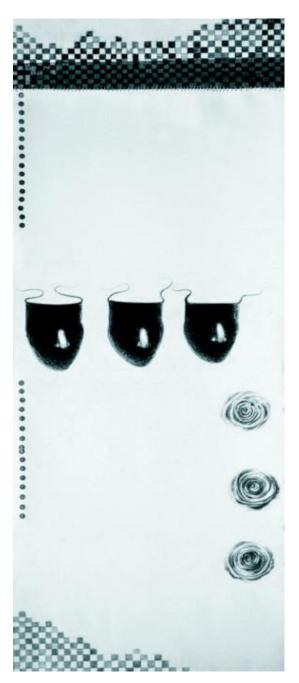
Still life with Flowers Anna Molka Ahmad Oil on Canvas 24 x 30 inches



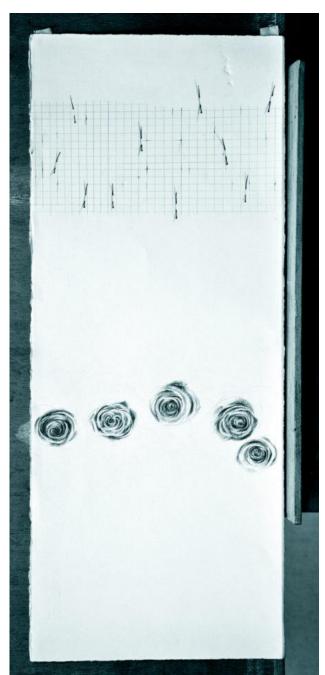
Portrait of two Sisters Anna Molka Ahmad Oil on Canvas 24 x 36 inches



Untitled
Nahid Raza
Woman Series
30x42 inches
Acrylic on Canvas



Untitled
Meher Afroz
Diptych, Graphite on
Somerset
11 x 30
2010



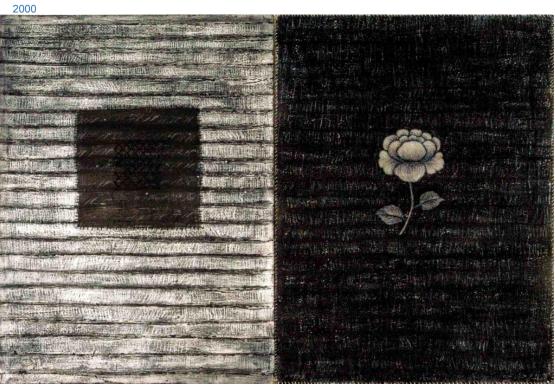
Untitled
Meher Afroz
Diptych, Graphite on
Somerset
11 x 30
2010



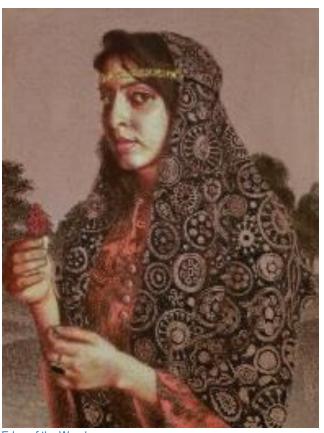
Poshak Series Meher Afroz Etching Print 2005



The People Wept at Dawn Salima Hashmi



Dastawaiz Meher Afroz Etching Print 2007



Edge of the Woods
Dua Abbas Rizvi
Pastel on Somerset-Paper
22 x 30 inches
2014



3 Graces Hiba Schahbaz



Hoor Imad Sherpao
Gouache and 24 Karat Gold Leaf on Wasli
Paper with Brass Frame
35 x 17
2021



Two Rich and Precious Stones Heraa Khan 24k gold leaf and gouache on paper

18 x 25 inches 2017



The Nothing Man Amra Khan Acrylics on Canvas 19.5 x 19.5 inches



Maria Khan



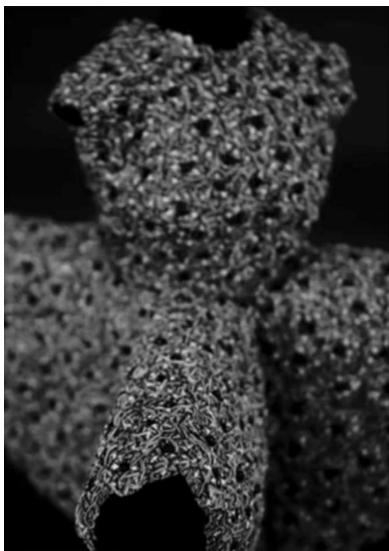


Red Rose Saadia Hussain Mixed media, digital print on paper 8inches x 5 inches 2017

Nusrat
Donia Qaiser
Mixed media
38 x 27 cm
2020



Sub Rosa
Bushra Waqas Khan
Organza, silk and Swarovski
Crystal
Height 24 cm, width variable
2021



Closeup of Sub Rosa
Bushra Waqas Khan
Organza, silk and Swarovski
Crystal
Height 24 cm, width variable
2021



Birth of Venus Ayesha Khalid Gouache on Walsi 2001

Fukoka Prefecture Art Museum



Farida Batool



Us Shehr Ka Choraha Farida Batool Digital Print 32 x 44 inches 2010





Video Stills from Mohabbat ka Sharbat Ammara Jabbar 2021 38 seconds 16:9, Single Channel





Video Still and display of The Realm of Infatuation
Hoor Imad Sherpao
Wall Neon Drawing: Varying sized components spread over wall sizing 38 feet x 13 feet, with length of tallest neon piece equal to 9.5 feet

Moonscapes

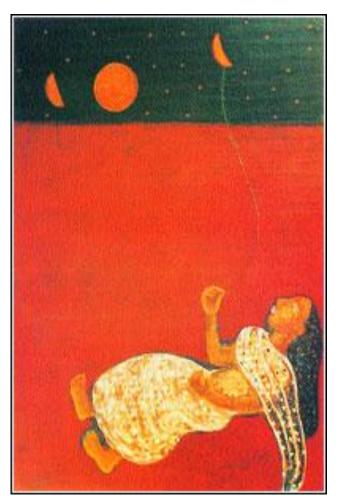
The beauty of the moon has often been compared to feminine beauty in poetry and literature. In recent decades its transcendent and spiritual aspect has been gradually replaced by other contexts. The moon and crescent emerges as a cosmological entity, a silent witness to political upheaval and finally its manipulation and use as a symbol of nationalistic representation, manipulation and its contestation. Through symbol and metaphor artists dismantle and examine the implications of such transgressions.



Verse from Iqbal Humaira Ejaz Oil on Paper 54 x 70 cm 1992



Salima Hashmi

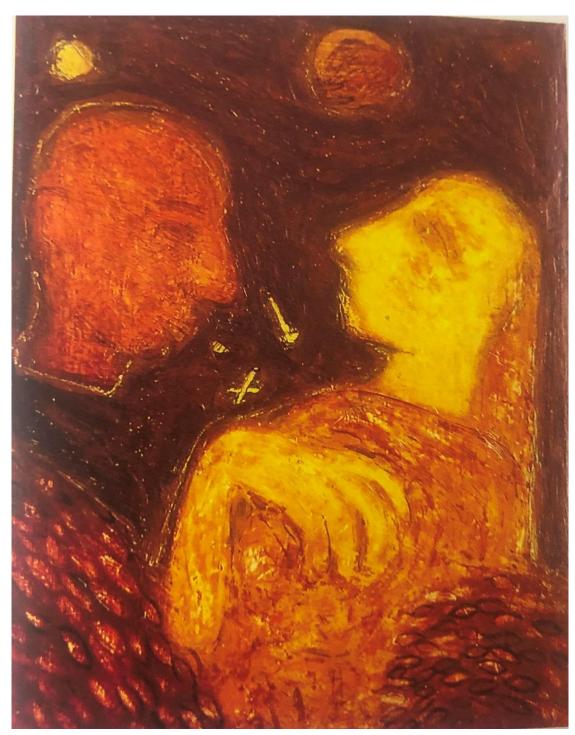


Zindaan Series Meher Afroze Acrylic on Wood 76 x 101 cm 2001

Coll: Samina Ibrahim



Niche Series Meher Afroze Acrylic on wood 40 x 63 cm 1997 Coll: Dr. G Aziz



Apparition Series Meher Afroze acrylic on wood 26 x 90 cm 1990

Coll: Fatima Jamil



Rahat Naveed Masud 24" x 30" (in) 60.9" x 76.20" (cm) Oil on Canvas



The Ritual Khadija Rehman Gouache on Arches Paper 20 x 30 inches



Khadija Rehman

Mixed Medium on Hahnemühle

Paper

16 x 20 inches



The Evening Tea- Dastarkhwaan Khadija Rehman Mixed edium Archival Print on

Hahnemühle Paper

12 x 16 inches

2021



Creation/Cremation
Anushka Rustomji
Acrylic, ink, graphite on
fired terracotta
earthenware
2022



Happy Birthday Sana Arjumand 3 ft x 4ft Oil on Canvas 2006



For Your Viewing Pleasure III
Farazeh Syed
Collage and Mixed Media on Plywood
12 X 12 inches



Medallion
Bushra Waqas Khan
Organza

Height: 48 cm Width: Variable

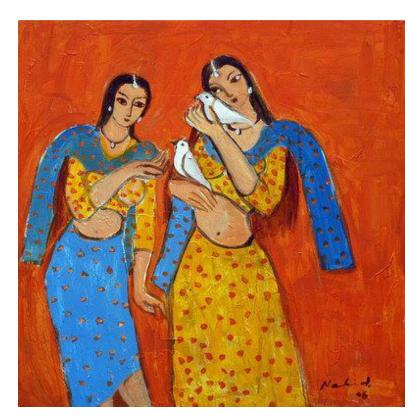
Birdscapes

Historically, in Indian miniature painting there is a longstanding tradition of depicting *naikas* and archetypal lovers. Such figurative descriptions are often situated in pavilions, under shaded trees with flowers in full bloom or in lush landscapes. In other variations *naikas* are depicted with birds, eagles, dancing peacocks or even a flock of birds. In *Ragamala* painting such iconography becomes pivotal in conveying *rasa* or emotion/mood. Interestingly most of the works by women artists in this series are divested of figurative depiction or such historical context but use the bird motif as a metaphor to initiate discourse on taboos, boundaries, the gender of spirituality and the lure of the surreal. Historically, drawing and painting the female figure in early Pakistani art had often been a domain defined by the presence of male painters. Their depictions of the woman-and bird archetype had been informed by Urdu poetry and its metaphors. In Persian literature and even in painting as well as decorative arts the *gul-o-bulbul* (rose and nightingale) motif was meant to symbolize perfection, spiritual enlightenment and the human spirit.

How have women artists since then, navigated between these cultural voids and devised counter narratives to the hegemony of the male artist- driven- conception of the female form, its relationship to nature and representation?



Self Portrait
Esmat Rahim
43 x 58.5 cm
Coll: S. Rahim
1961-62



Nahid Raza



Conference of the Birds Series Riffat Alvi 2020



Conference of the Birds Series Riffat Alvi 2020



Untitled Riffat Alvi



Nilofer Akmut Bodily Perceptions Installation 2002



Adeela Suleman

Cooking utensil, spoons, jar,
powder coating & enamel paint;
inside padded with foam & cloth

H. 18 x W. 10 x D. 10 in. (48.3 x

25.4 x 25.4 cm)

2005, reproduced in 2008



Jacob's Creek Masooma Syed



Crow Seeking Friendship I

Rabia Akhtar

6 x 6 inches

Gouache on Wasli

2021



Gadani Ruby Chishti Installation 2001



Ruby Chishti 2011





After All It's Always Somebody Else Who Dies Adeela Suleman Steel, repousse work



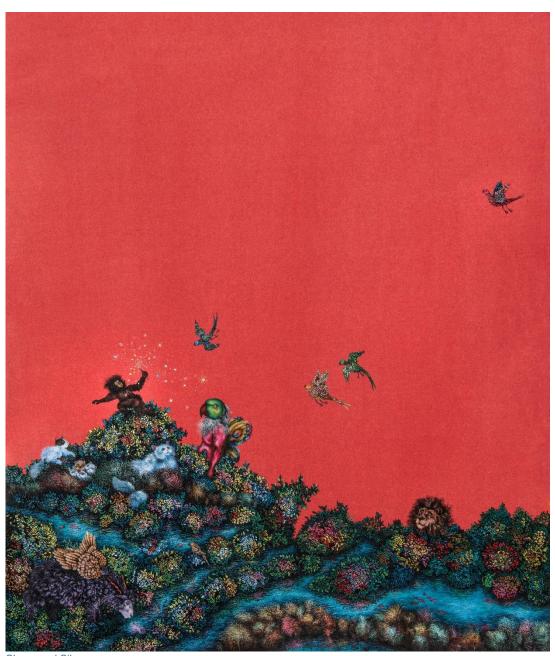
Closeup of After All It's Always Somebody Else Who Dies Adeela Suleman Steel, repousse work



Masooma Syed



Falling Down
Adeela Suleman
Stretcher, stainless steel, powder
paint
185 x 350 x 13 cm.
2012



Chase and Silence Rabia Akhtar 21 x 26 inches Gouache on Wasli 2021



Defiance
Sana Arjumand
19 x 19 inches
Oil, Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas
2019



Sana Arjumand
Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
59 x 72 inches
2017



Mirror Khadija Rehman Gouache on Paper 22 x 30 inches



The Witnessing Khadija Rehman Gouache on Paper 20 x 15 inches

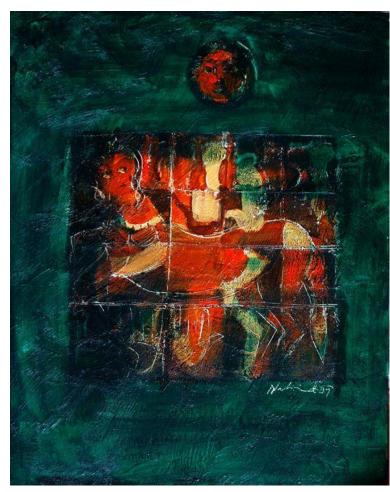
Hybrid Bodies

Women are often cast in conflicting roles. They are both desired and vilified, celebrated and controlled. Figurines of the mother goddess excavated from the Indus Valley Civilization invest the female body with primordial power; borne of the Earth the Goddess has the ability to give life. Conceived to represent flesh the figurines carry the vitality and sensuousness of her body. Yet hundreds of years down the lane, depictions of the female figure mediated by the gaze of men, have divested them of meaning. Domesticated into submission and sapped of the rich histories and visual cultures that had enriched it with metaphor and contradiction, representations of the female body lost their metaphors.

Mythic fantasies and hybrid depictions become a battleground for such conflicts to play out on. The artist-as-woman in Nahid Raza's works emerges to "shed" skin and fulfill desires and dreams. To embody both the sacred and profane. Or perhaps liberate herself as a woman. In some of her works the repression of the self can transform into an existential crisis. This is a body in stasis; by beheading the female figure it is divested of identity and a cosmographic cipher for fertility, the fish emerges as a crude signifier. Conversely the headless body draws attention to the brazen body. Surreal and uncanny representations of this conflicted identity continue to help contemporary Pakistani women artists talk about gender, appearance, suppression of desire and a chance at attaining freedom.



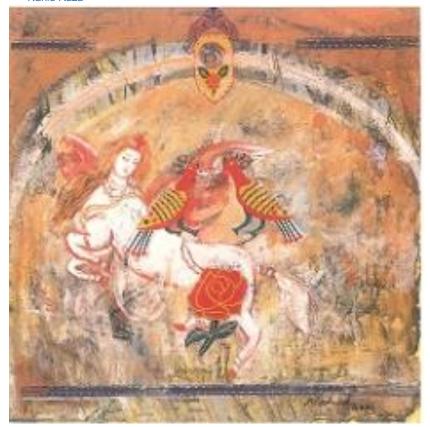
Untitled
Nahid Raza
Woman Series



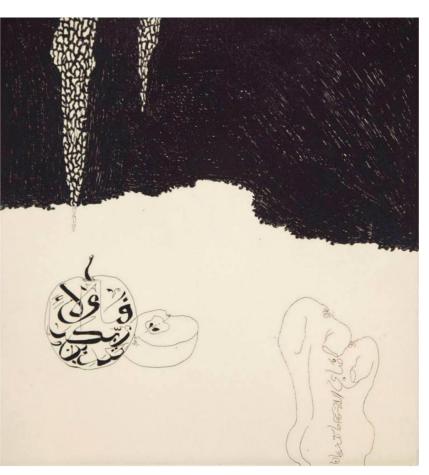
Buraq Series 2 Nahid Raza



Buraq Series 3 Nahid Raza



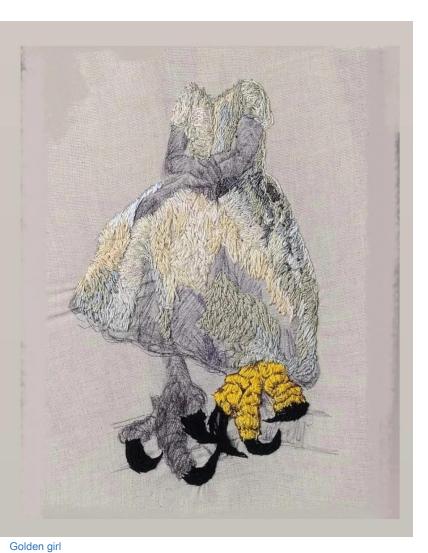
Buraq Nahid Raza 63 x 63 cm 2001



Let us make Man in Our Image Laila Mehreen Rehman Etching and Aquatint 9 inches x 9 inches 2011



As if by Nature Wardha Shabbir Water Color on Wasli 9 inches x 12 inches



Sarah Mumtaz Embroidery on cloth Series: Love is the new Black

2014

She was always waiting, it seems to be her forte- D. H Lawrence Sarah Mumtaz Ballpoint on paper

Series: Love is the New Black" 2014



The Birth of Ve-Vixen Wardha Shabbir Mix Medium on Wasli 10 inches x 16 inches



Within the Neglected Soul
Wardha Shabbir
water color and gouache on wasli
7.5 x 8 inches
2011



Bred-Winner Ammara Jabbar Gouache on Arches 27x33 inches 2022



Armour suit for Rani of Jhansi (Heavenly Ornament- Bahishti Zaevar)

Series

Naiza Khan

galvanised steel, feathers and leather

90 x 45 x 35 cm

2008/2017



Ruby Chishti
mixed-media sculpture
2012



Blemishes of Times II Ruby Chishti mixed-media sculpture 2009



Quiet Pathways to Eternity

Rabia S. Akhtar Gouache on Wasli

2021



Closeup of Quiet Pathways to Eternity Rabia S. Akhtar Gouache on Wasli 2021



Ride 2 Hamra Abbas 2008