

TATE RESEARCH CENTRE: ASIA

KARACHI SEMINAR CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ART AND EDUCATION

The expanded definition of practice in contemporary art now encompasses forms of direct political engagement, collaboration, social activity and public performance. How do these often temporary actions and alliances relate to the understanding, practice and education of art in Pakistan?

Today, artistic practice in South Asia is centred around art schools based in metropolitan cities; these spaces provide a generative site for artistic production. Meanwhile, public investment in cultural institutions has been inconsistent with the professionalisation and educational investment in art and design. Ideological shifts and limited institutional support constrain the fields of academic research and art historical scholarship.

With the recent arrival of the biennial exhibition, new funding mechanisms are emerging, changing the social and political landscape within which artists live and work. How are both artists and academics responding to the confluence of critical practice and private financial interests now driving cultural projects in cities such as Karachi? How does the biennial identify and address its audience, and how is the site of the exhibition understood as a dialogic or discursive space? How might we place recent developments against the histories of art practice and exhibition making in South Asia?

This seminar, in combining academic research, politics and visual culture in the contemporary art world, aims to explore new geographical and cultural formations from which to advance the decolonial project, and to experiment with models of critical pedagogy that move beyond conventional art school and exhibition formats.

The Karachi Seminar is organised by Tate Research Centre: Asia in partnership with Habib University and the British Council with support from the Lahore Biennale Foundation. Tate Research Centre: Asia has been generously supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation



SATURDAY 24 MARCH

HABIB UNIVERSITY

9:00 REGISTRATION

9:50 INTRODUCTIONS

10:00 PANEL 1: URBAN SITES: WORKING THROUGH THE CITY

The field of urban planning and research has become well-established as an academic discipline in Pakistan, particularly in Karachi. In parallel, a new generation of artistic practitioners explore their lived environments through visual research, socially engaged practice and collaborative work. This panel explores recent artist-led investigation and intervention as critical practice.

Approaches to urban development and regeneration, civil rights and public memory, the notion of the artist as a community or social worker, and new exhibition models that claim public accessibility are all explored against the complex conditions of a city where the boundaries of class and the apparatuses of civic safety and control remain straitened.

10:05 DIY CITY

DIY City comprises multidisciplinary interventions aimed at opening up the public realm as an open-air gallery, laboratory, classroom, playground – and transforming it into an inclusive urban retreat.

Since its inception in 2015, Numaish-Karachi provides opportunities for 'Design for Participation', responding to the recognition that some public are surprisingly under-utilised while others were under-resourced. These alternative locations allowed us to generate practical solutions and rethink social, cultural, economic, and environmental challenges.

DIY City, a hyperlocal guerilla place-making project took its intervention in 2017 to the Sobhraj Chetumal Terrace at Burnes Garden. We designed a 'Do-it Yourself' programme, working at the intersection of design, culture, science and technology to encourage community engagement; this resulted in the development and implementation of an undergraduate course at Habib University.

DIY City, Karachi-Manchester is part of an on-going collaboration between Karachi's award winning interdisciplinary collective Numaish-Karachi and UK based MadLab DIY City is supported by The British Council Pakistan, Habib University and Karachi Metropolitan Corporation.

Saima Zaidi is an Assistant Professor in the Communication and Design programme and Director of the Center for Media and Design, Habib University. She is Core Team Member of *Numaish Karachi*, an award-winning multidisciplinary collective which aims to open up public space for cultural production. She has edited '*Mazaar, Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan*' published by Oxford University Press and Prince Claus Fund Library.

10:20 SHERSHAH AUR DEEGAR KAHANIAN

This presentation will focus on the process of working and engaging with ideas of transitioning economies in the aspiring city of Karachi, referring to our recent project *'Shershah aur Deegar Kahanian*. In this project we worked with an aspiring (unpublished) poet, third generation of cap makers, a carpet making business in the process of being sold, and an investor/ middleman who deals in metal scrap in the vast junkyards/ warehouses of Shershah, Karachi to create nonlinear windows into present moments of urban life. By engaging in the intimately local rhythms of work which point towards global shifts in production we collage together questions regarding the valuable and the wasted.

The Tentative Collective is a gathering of artists, curators, teachers, and collaborators from diverse backgrounds including fishermen, housewives and domestic workers. We work site specifically in response to Karachi, we are interested in engaging with the specificities and commonalities of modernity in rapidly transforming landscapes of the global south; in particular the precarious urban geographies of such cities and the voids they open for groups like ours to inhabit. Navigating through these same precarious urban geographies, we create poetic and ephemeral moments in conversation with the city's infrastructures.

10.40 THE RAKSHAS RAILWAY AND UNRULY LINES

What does a border look like when it comes undone? This text tracks the violent colonial history as well as the transformations, degradation, ruptures and restorations of the railway infrastructure in Pakistan. Navigating through selected sites and historical moments, we explore the possibilities of state violence and resistance lurking within the rusting remnants of railway infrastructure.

Shahana Rajani and **Zahra Malkani** are an artist duo based in Karachi exploring the politics of infrastructure and development in the rapidly transforming city. Shahana and Zahra are also co-founders of the Karachi LaJamia, an anti-institution seeking to politicise art education and explore new radical pedagogies and art practices.

11:00 TEA BREAK

11:15 FROM JANTA COLONY TO JANTA COLONY

(imaginary to destroyed)

Via print and film, music, love, bulldozers, state propaganda and peoples archives.

Part-I: 1950 to 1982

This evening presentation uses a range of archival materials: local press, mini-institutional archives such as that of BUILD (Bombay Industrial League of Development), and city-based documentary and fiction film, to tell story about housing in the city. We are taken from the imaginary *Janta Colony* that is the cornerstone of Raj Kapoors Shree 420, to the actual *Janata Colony* demolitions in the late 1970s in the BARC area from which people were moved into Cheeta Camp among many 'inner migrations' of city dwellers to places like Mankhurd and Jogeshwari in this period. We are reminded

of various aspects of the 'housing question' that are not only to do with power struggles over land and FSI, but a different landscape of solidarity and creativity among people living in the city, and those who moved here.

60 minutes, edited video and photo sequences with live commentary - Shaina Anand, Simpreet Singh, Ashok Sukumaran

CAMP was founded in Mumbai in 2007 by artist and filmmaker Shaina Anand, software programmer Sanjay Bhangar, and architect and artist Ashok Sukumaran. The studio's collective output is characterised by its hands-on engagement with technology and spans video, film, electronic media, and public art forms. From their base in Chuim village, the studio co-hosts Pad.ma the online archive of footage and unmade films, and Indiaincine.ma, an annotated online archive of Indian film. Through its long-term, durational projects, CAMP aims to reconfigure distribution platforms such as cinemas, libraries, exhibitions, books, and websites for the future, and as a way to question the present politics of authority and ownership.

12:15 DISCUSSION MODERATED BY NAUSHEEN H. ANWAR

Nausheen H. Anwar is Associate Professor City & Regional Planning at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi, Pakistan. Her work focuses on policy-making and planning processes that sustain urban and regional inequality. She has authored *Infrastructure Redux: Crisis, Progress in Industrial Pakistan & Beyond* (2015, Palgrave Macmillan). Her ongoing research examines the intersections between infrastructure, vulnerability and violence and related reconfigurations in the gendered politics of everyday urban life in Pakistan; and urban futures as imagined through mega-infrastructure projects such as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

13:00 LUNCH BREAK (PROVIDED ON CAMPUS)

14:00 PANEL 2: NEGOTIATING HISTORY: RECUPERATING ARTISTIC PRACTICE AND EXHIBITION HISTORIES

The field of art historical research exists at the margins of the art academy in Pakistan, where pedagogy has tended to focus on material practice and art education. A new generation of writers and researchers, however, galvanised by a transnational network of academics and institutions interested in the art histories of the global South, are articulating fresh ground to challenge the traditional constraints of the art historical canon.

This session brings together studies of individual artistic practices, particularly by women artists whose work while seminal has been occluded; new scholarship exploring exhibition histories, both in conventional gallery spaces and through the circulation of print publications; and research that reconsiders established local narratives through gendered and nuanced readings.

14:05 TEMPORAL EXCHANGES: EAST AND WEST PAKISTAN EXHIBITION PROGRAMS, 1947-71

From 1961 to 1977, Pakistani Modernist artist and gallerist Zubeida Agha (1922-1997) ran the Rawalpindi Art Galleries – Pakistan’s first art gallery since its founding in 1947. Agha worked closely with artists across West and East Pakistan (current day Bangladesh) and put together exhibitions in Pakistan and on an international platform. On a micro level, there is little to no literature available on the gallery and its programming, other than an acknowledgment of its existence. On a macro level, the same scarcity of literature is evident regarding shared artistic activities between Pakistan and Bangladesh, especially when they were one nation, from 1947-1971.

This paper seeks to introduce audiences to these shared exhibition histories through the lens of Agha’s work and the Rawalpindi Art Galleries. It will also seek to articulate the role of the state in the art world of the early years of Pakistan, when the lines between public and private programming were still blurry. These insights have been made possible by examining ephemera collected from Agha’s residence, as part of a research fellowship supported by Lahore Biennale Foundation and Asia Art Archive.

Saira Ansari is a researcher and a writer with an interest in South Asian art history and publishing. She works in Research and Publications at the Sharjah Art Foundation and is also a contributing editor for the South Asian literary journal *Papercuts*. Her curatorial projects include *The importance of staying quiet* (Hong Kong, 2014), a collaborative project exhibiting six decades of minimal art from Pakistan. Ansari was the recipient of the Lahore Biennale Foundation Research Fellowship (2016), granted in conjunction with Asia Art Archive to develop a digital archive on Pakistani modernist Zubeida Agha. Seminar participation includes ‘Displays of Internationalism’ symposium at the Dhaka Art Summit (Bangladesh, 2018) and March Meeting 2018 (UAE, 2018).

14:25 PAKISTAN QUARTERLY AND MODERN ART OF PAKISTAN

The formative years of Pakistan after its establishment in 1947 was a time of anticipation and flux. During this time, print media played a pivotal role in articulating various co-existing ideologies of Pakistani government and intellectuals that resulted in producing a Pakistani society – an amalgamation of diverse schools of thought. While daily newspapers like *Paisa Akhbar*, *Military Gazette*, and *Jang* addressed the day-to-day operations of the newly formed government-at-large, magazines such as *Ahsas*, *Illustrated Weekly of Pakistan*, *Mirror of the Month*, *Pakistani Adab*, and *Pakistan Quarterly*, featured articles on various aspects of modernism in Pakistan, including fine arts. However, the early art history of Pakistan remains understudied because of the scarcity of readily available publications. The few featuring articles on fine arts were short-lived and difficult to find now.

This paper will focus on the role of *Pakistan Quarterly*, published from Karachi between 1949 and the 1970s, as a case study to investigate various aspects of print media in promoting modern art and other secular topics to the general public. The cover pages of *Pakistan Quarterly* mostly reproduced artworks of various artists from East and West Pakistan. This paper posits that these cover pages served as an exhibition site for these artworks, which are now lost and out of public sight. Hence, in a small way, through the reproduction of artworks, *Pakistan Quarterly* played an important role in promoting modern art in Pakistan. Along with fine arts, the publication also published articles on an array of social, political, economic, cultural, and literary aspects of Pakistan that serve as historical

documents, enabling researchers to construct the narrative and development of the new nation of Pakistan.

Samina Iqbal is a practicing artist, art historian, and an academic. She received her BFA from the National College of Arts Lahore and MFA from the University of Minnesota. She completed her PhD in art historical studies from the Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond in 2016. Samina has taught studio arts and art history in the US and Pakistan for last 15 years and currently working as an Assist. Professor at the Lahore School of Economics, Pakistan.

15:05 RIVER IN AN OCEAN

As a part of the study of ideas centred on a turn to nature, I turn to the practice of Lala Rukh to map her travels to the sea, the rivers, and contemplations on the horizon line from feminist activist perspective. In doing so, I hope to unpack aspects of her work as a critique of masculine nationalism in favour of a more universal feminine language that draws from artistic and literary imagination in a way that while symbolising resilience is both questioning, and probing. For example, Lala Rukh 1995 drawing *Hieroglyphics I: koi ashiq kisi mehbooba se 1 & 2* (A Lover to His Beloved) draws inspiration from Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem of the same name and links with yet another poem by Faiz *Subh-e-Azadi* (Dawn of Freedom) in later sound piece *Subh-e-Umeed* (Dawn of Hope) 2008 inspired by the events leading up to the Lawyers Movement in Pakistan.

Lala Rukh's *Sigiriya* series 1993 or *Sand drawings* 2000-2015 and body of photographs *Sagar* shown for the first time in 2017, do not simply punctuate her travels around the world. What is less known is that while most of these meditations by the water were in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Burma, many of these photographs were taken during Lala's travels to the region as a part of her activist work as a member of the South Asian feminist network. For instance, the body of images that make *Sand drawings* were photographed in the evenings after print and poster making workshop with women activists and during curfew hours at the height of the war years on the beaches of Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. This turn to nature in parallel with an affiliation to a politics of protest and resistance points at an understanding of art as desacralized and egalitarian in the region. It avoids the pitfalls of both nationalism based on idyllic notions of rural life and violence associated by a break from nature and enforced modernity tied with the idea of scientific progress and development.

Mariah Lookman is a Pakistani researcher, writer and artist. Her practice and research interests are art and the history of ideas with special focus on scientific ideas/inventions and the political. Lookman holds the position of Affiliate Curator for the Lahore Biennale, Visiting Lecturer at SVIAS, Eastern University, Batticaloa, and Adjunct Researcher, Tate Research Centre: Asia. Currently she is setting up an artist's residency with an interdisciplinary and multi-format publication called "Art South Asia" (ASA). Lookman has a D.Phil. from the Ruskin School of Art (2014). She piloted the first archival research and data base project with Citizen's Archive Pakistan as the Independent Researcher for Pakistan for Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong 2015-16. In 2015 she collaborated with Sharjah Biennale in relation to the work of Pakistani conceptual artist Lala Rukh. Mariah Lookman lives and works between Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom.

15:25 KARACHI POP: EXPERIMENTS AND INNOVATION IN ARTISTIC PRACTICE 1989-1999

Pakistan's largest and commercial capital, Karachi, went through a tumultuous period of conflict in the 1990s following the fall of a long dictatorship. Despite the uncertainty, and perhaps due to it, the city, which had been largely marginalised in art production, became the site of particularly provocative and experimental art-making in the 1990s. This was complemented by new art institutions – schools, galleries, studios, collectives and more. The resultant movement and production has been referred to as “Karachi Pop”. This presentation will explore artistic production during this period in Karachi, speculating on some of the reasons the “Karachi Pop” movement may have occurred, exploring how the city became a site of investigation and a canvas for art display and link between popular culture and art. Through an examination of these three specific projects, it also argues that Karachi Pop was a feminist moment, led by women who examined their role in public space and institutions. It concludes with questions about continued inspiration and making today.

Aziz Sohail is an art curator, writer and researcher based in Pakistan. He has curated numerous exhibitions in the USA, UK and Pakistan and was a curator-in-residence at The New Art Gallery Walsall in 2015 and a South Asia Fellow at Cornell University in 2017. He has worked with important organizations such as the Lahore Biennale Foundation and the British Council to build new cultural initiatives and spaces. Through his current research, Sohail is building an archive of cultural and visual production of Karachi in the 1990s as well as engaging with histories of queerness as seen in visual culture and literature in South Asia.

15:45 DISCUSSION MODERATED BY SALONI MATHUR

Saloni Mathur is Professor of Art History at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is author of *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (UC Press, 2007), editor of *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora* (Yale University Press/Clark Art Institute, 2011), and co-editor (with Kavita Singh) of *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia* (Routledge, 2014). Her current book, *A Fragile Inheritance: Radical Stakes in Contemporary Indian Art*, is forthcoming with Duke University Press.

16.15 TEA BREAK

16:30 PANEL 3: WATERY BIENNALES: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BIENNIALIZATION ALONG THE INDIAN OCEAN

This session considers regional biennials through a comparative frame, consciously set against the backdrop of the Lahore Biennale, which is currently taking place. Through critical responses to the Colombo Art Biennale, the first edition of the Karachi Biennale, and the Sharjah and Kochi-Muziris models, we will consider the effect the biennial has on infrastructure, art production and circulation.

Should the biennial stand in for the museum and can it generate more public participation than traditional institutional forms of exhibition making? What role does the biennial curatorial or artistic director play? We examine how government involvement as well as private funding is navigated and the impact on artistic autonomy. Today, artists and curators work within these structures and yet

resist the demands of neoliberal agendas of cultural development, tourism or gentrification, particularly in post-conflict settings. What new networks are generated, and what is their legacy for the local artistic community?

16:35 SPACES FOR COUNTER-INFORMATION: COLOMBO ART BIENNALE AND COLOMBOSCOPE

What are the possibilities and problematics of the mega-exhibition in post-conflict Sri Lanka? This presentation aims to build upon previous reviews, interviews and discussions on large-scale contemporary art festivals, such as the Colombo Art Biennale (2009-2016 editions) and Colomboscope (2013-2017 editions), using three essays from the *Spaces for Criticism: Shifts in Contemporary Art Discourses*, (eds. Suzana Milevska, Pascal Gielen, Thijs Lijster, Ruth Sonderegger, 2015), as a point of departure.

Jorinde Seijdel's text 'Information as a Site of Conflict and a Site of Critique', helps us to contextualise the role such festivals play as spaces for counter-information; Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler's 'Re-thinking Institution and Critique' provides a critical framework for the expectations and ethics of rapidly evolving institutions; and the Kontekst Collective's 'Spaces of New Social and Art Criticism and Their Re-Conditioning' opens up timely questions on the ripple effects of such new platforms.

Jyoti Dhar is an art critic currently based in Colombo. She is a contributing editor for Art Asia Pacific and regularly contributes to Artforum and The Sunday Times in Sri Lanka. She is the recipient of the Forbes India Emerging Art Writer of the Year award 2014 and first prize at the International Awards for Art Criticism 4 in 2017.

16:55 WHOSE CITY IS IT ANYWAY? NOTES ON THE INAUGURAL KARACHI BIENNALE

The inaugural Karachi Biennale (KB17) took place last fall amidst claims of open engagement and urban renewal. It aspired to bring art outside the confines of the galleries and into the city, to reclaim heritage sites, and to engage with a "quotidian" Karachi. It also placed Karachi on the international network of Biennales, especially those in the South. If we consider KB17 as a manifestation of the desire to engage with Karachi's complex and varied urban realities, how do its claims hold up in their implications and execution? What happens when the desire for global relevance comes up against the practical limitations of our political climate? Although a biennale promises great potential for discursive and institutional growth in Karachi, it is also affected by the scope of our pre-existing infrastructure and financial capabilities. To what extent does this infrastructure facilitate the model of a biennale, and to what extent does it prove to be a challenge? Or alternatively, how far can the biennale model elevate our pre-existing capabilities? We offer possible approaches to answering these questions, while assessing the impact of home-grown versus imported solutions.

Fiza Khatri is an artist based in Karachi, and co-facilitates Karachi Crit Group. She received her BA in Studio Art from Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA. She has exhibited her work locally and internationally including in New York, Philadelphia, Lahore, and Karachi. Her work explores notions of how we live through the ubiquitous mundanities of everyday life.

Sophia Balagamwala is an artist and illustrator based in Karachi, and a co-facilitator of the Karachi Crit Group. She has a BA from the University of Toronto and an MFA from Cornell University. Her works explore the space where history meets fiction and nonsense. She is currently the curator at the Citizens Archive of Pakistan.

17:15 JOURNEYING FROM THE *HEART OF SHARJAH* TO KOCHI-MUZIRIS: COASTAL BIENNIALS AND THE LURE OF MARITIME HISTORIES

The inaugural Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2012) appealed to its site, Fort Cochin in Kerala, as a heterogeneous, free space with a cosmopolitan history that would allow for a blurring of conventional boundaries. The conscious evocation of the lost historic port city of Muziris connected contemporary Kochi to a deeper and pre-national past, and Kerala to a world wider than mere India. The framing of the medieval port as host city inevitably emulates Venice, where the 'global' art world displays its power since 1895.

A more recent model for biennial-making in the region was established in Sharjah. Expanding from a small international exhibition into a powerful commissioner and funder of artistic production across the region, the Sharjah Biennial and Foundation is an influential force in what is known as MENASA: the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, with the Gulf as its ostensible centre. Meanwhile, a real estate development project in the area around the biennial venue is slowly transforming the city into a simulation of a pre-colonial Arabian port city.

How might this play of diachronic and synchronic time, and of geographical decentering and re-centering affect the construction of the biennial model across the Indian Ocean littoral?

Nada Raza is Research Curator at Tate Research Centre: Asia, with a particular focus on South Asia. Previously Assistant Curator at Tate Modern, Raza contributed to *Meschac Gaba: Museum of Contemporary African Art* in 2013 and curated *Bhupen Khakhar: You Can't Please All* in 2016. Alongside leading on acquisitions from the region she has worked on collection displays of work by Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian and Zarina Hashmi in 2012, Sheela Gowda in 2016 and Amar Kanwar in 2017. Raza curated a thematic exhibition, *The Missing One* for the Dhaka Art Summit in Bangladesh and the Office for Contemporary Art in Norway in 2016 and was selected to be the curator of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize 2014. She is also a PhD candidate at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

17:35 DISCUSSION MODERATED BY DR. IFTIKHAR DADI

Dr. Iftikhar Dadi is an Associate Professor at Cornell University. He teaches and researches modern and contemporary art from a global and transnational perspective, with emphasis on questions of methodology and intellectual history. His writings have focused on modernism and contemporary practice of Asia, the Middle East and their diasporas. Another research interest examines the film, media, and popular cultures of South Asia, seeking to understand how emergent publics forge new avenues for civic participation.

18:15 CLOSING REMARKS AND THANKS FROM THE ORGANISERS