

## LALA RUKH: PANEL DISCUSSION

ONLINE EVENT, YOUTUBE

FRIDAY 2 OCTOBER 2020

### A conversation on the life and legacy of the artist

The life and work of Pakistani artist Lala Rukh (1947-2017) crossed art and activism and touched on media including drawing, photography and print. The presentations and discussion aim to bring new and diverse considerations on her work including her involvement in the Women's Action Forum, her deep relation to music as well as her continuing influence on contemporary art.

### PROGRAMME

Friday 2 October 2020, 13:00-14:30 (UTC+1)

13:00 – 13:05 Introduction by Devika Singh, Curator, International Art, Tate Modern

13:05 – 13:20 Mariah Lookman (artist, educationalist, researcher and curator, Galle, Sri Lanka)

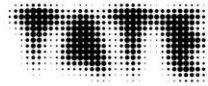
*Lala Rukh's Camera: Listening with photography and drawing the space of time*

The group photograph of the first Women's Action Forum (WAF) National Convention was shot with a self-timer on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1982. Stretched out in front of the image is the artist Lala Rukh who took this momentous photograph and thereafter went on to document WAF protests marches for decades to follow. In materialist understanding, a photograph is a mechanical record of an event mediated through light. However, as an activist/participant/witness Lala's political photographs not only record an event but also represent particularity. For instance, one set of photographs captures the spirit of the marches for equal rights for women, and another, the striking eeriness of the day after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2007. In this paper I propose that once these political photographs are moored side-by-side series of drawings such as *Mirror Image* (1997 & 2011) and photographs such as *Sagar* (2017), Lala's use of the camera technically and ideologically links activism to art making, foregrounding the philosophical problem of perception, truth, totality, and representation in her practice. The possibilities of decoding the pitch surfaces depicting the dark nights over the expanse of the ocean are endless and complex. I argue that just as photography enables the process of rendering observation self-conscious for the artist, in its most abstract sense, the expanse of the ocean enables the recognition of infinity of situations and infinity of choices: moral, judicial and political.

13:20 – 13:35 Ayesha Jatoi (artist, Lahore)

*Of Sounds & Silences, Lala Rukh: Teacher, Mentor, Friend*

Lala Rukh was an extremely private person. But those of us that were lucky enough to have been taught by her got a closer insight to her exceptional personality. Lala taught for over 30 years in



Lahore and her spare time was spent for the various causes she believed in fervently: the women's movement, the environment and conservation on music. Yet she still managed to keep up her art practice – the enigmatic drawings, photographs and soundscapes – delicate as it were yet boldly defying Pakistan's art norms. She chose to remain on the fringe of the local art establishment but would never compromise on her ideals. As an educator, she encouraged us to not take for granted our indigenous aesthetic and cultural heritages. The paradigm shift was an important one in an art history disrupted by colonial and postcolonial forces.

13:35 -13:50 Natasha Ginwala (associate curator, Gropius Bau, artistic director, 13th Gwangju Biennale, Berlin and Colombo)

### *Still Point in a Turning World*

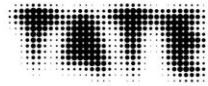
Lala Rukh explored a coded language and gestures that formed a system of daily notation conjoining the corporeal condition, solidarity building and artistic pedagogy. In working with her it quickly became apparent how the space of drawing bears visual testimony toward the essential role of subtraction in pictorial language and of the counter-point as a subjective means to interpret motion between the one and the many. Her minimalist notation studies and animation that comprise the project *Rupak*, first commissioned and exhibited at documenta 14 in Athens, treat the paper and screen surfaces to a kinetic gradient much like the sea of vibrations received upon the stretched skin of a *tabla*. This reading of Lala Rukh's practice will also endeavour to converse with conditions of darkness and opacity as they unveil an expanded relationality across her oeuvre.

13.50 – 14:30

Panel Discussion with Mariah Lookman, Ayesha Jatoi and Natasha Ginwala, moderated by Devika Singh, followed by Q&A from the audience.

### Biographies

**Mariah Lookman** is an artist, occasional curator and educationalist specialising in studio and process centred research-based practice combined with teaching methods that thrive on the crossovers between making and writing. Most recently Mariah was Academic Consultant and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Visual and Technological Arts, SVIAS, Eastern University, Sri Lanka (2017-2019). She was awarded the Lahore Biennale Foundation Fellowship with Asma Jahangir Award for Cultural Contribution Towards Social Justice (2018-19) to research on the work of Lala Rukh and held Adjunct Researcher post at Tate Modern in London (2018). As an educationalist she works on institution building, curricula innovation and staff and teaching methods development. She is especially interested in areas of post-conflict rebuilding through the arts. Mariah Lookman has a BA from National College of Arts, Lahore, MA from the Slade School of Fine Art and D.Phil. from the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford in 2015. She is getting back to making art after a hiatus of almost five years and is presently working two films and one book project.



**Ayesha Jatoi** is an artist who trained in miniature painting at the National College of Arts in Lahore, and her practice primarily explores the traditional manuscript's symbiotic relationship between image and text. While being immersed in local ancient aesthetics of iconography, she simultaneously questions the relevance of traditional modes of constructing images today; resulting in a practice which takes on hybrid forms. Her work has been exhibited widely, most recently at the Shanghai Biennale, the Inaugural Lahore Biennale, the Dhaka Art Summit, Concrete Dubai, WIP: Konsthall, Stockholm, and Nelson Atkins Museum, USA. Jatoi was among the founding editors of the Journal of Art & Culture and is visiting faculty for the MA (Hons) Visual Arts Program at the National College of Arts, Lahore.

**Natasha Ginwala** is a curator and writer. She is Associate Curator at Gropius Bau, Berlin and artistic director of COLOMBOSCOPE, Colombo. Ginwala has curated Contour Biennale 8, "Polyphonic Worlds: Justice as Medium" and was part of the curatorial team of documenta14, 2017. Other recent projects include "Arrival, Incision. Indian Modernism as Peripatetic Itinerary" in the framework of "Hello World. Revising a Collection" at Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, 2018; "Riots: Slow Cancellation of the Future" at ifa Gallery Berlin and Stuttgart, 2018; "My East is Your West" at the 56th Venice Biennale, 2015; and "Corruption: Everybody Knows..." with e-flux, New York, 2015. Ginwala was a member of the artistic team for the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2014, and co-curated "The Museum of Rhythm" at Taipei Biennial 2012 and at Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, 2016–2017. From 2013–2015, in collaboration with Vivian Ziherl, she led the multi-part curatorial project "Landings" presented at various partner organizations. Ginwala writes on contemporary art and visual culture in various periodicals and has contributed to numerous publications. She is a recipient of the 2018 visual arts research grant from the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe.