FUGITIVE ABSTRACTION:
ZARINA, MOHAMEDI, AND LALA RUKH

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FUGITIVE ABSTRACTION

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This dissertation attends to the important but largely unexamined history of abstraction across postcolonial South Asia during the second half of the twentieth century. It focuses on a loose constellation of artists on whom little scholarship exists—Zarina (1937-2020), Nasreen Mohamedi (1937-1990), and Lala Rukh (1948-2017)—women who were working across postcolonial Pakistan, India, the western Indian Ocean, and its diasporas. *Fugitive Abstraction* investigates the artists' shared approach to aesthetic form that links the traumatic partition of the Indian subcontinent with decolonization and the diasporic dislocations that resulted, foregrounding themes of translation, fugitivity, hapticality, and opacity. Instead of situating these artists' practices within Euro-American postwar abstraction, a category they are often subsumed under, I demonstrate instead how they negotiated the fraught inheritance of colonial modernism by reframing early modern art and architectural aesthetics as a site of postcolonial feminist reclamation. These artists drew indigenous aesthetics—Mughal, Buddhist and Hindu architecture, Indo-Persian miniature painting techniques, and Urdu poetry—together with Post-Minimalist, process-based material experiments in photo-montage, collage, printmaking, drawing and sculpture. "Fugitive," in the dissertation title, brings the methodologies of Black studies together with postcolonial and translation theory, as well as feminist and queer theory, to analyze a form of abstraction in these artists' works that is a transgression of nationalist reconfigurations of postcolonial representation—of the post-independence nation-state, the sanctity of territorial boundaries, and the gendered narratives of home and homeland. Ultimately, I argue that these underrepresented artists refuse the representational, territorial and imaginal boundaries of the nation-states of India and Pakistan, offering us an example of migratory, minoritarian aesthetics that precede discourses of globalization in the 1990s and the concurrent rise of majoritarian nationalism and ethno-racialized communal violence across South Asia.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sadia Shirazi received a Bachelor of Arts with Honors in History from the University of Chicago in 1999. In 2003, she was a recipient of The Architecture League of New York's Deborah J. Norden Fund travel grant. She received a Master of Architecture from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2008. During her time at MIT she was editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Thresholds* and recipient of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture travel grant. Shirazi practiced as an architect at Safdie Associates and was co-founder of Studio Zuzu. In 2010-2011, she was a Helena Rubinstein Curatorial Fellow at the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program. In 2012-2013, she was a recipient of a Short Term Faculty Hiring Program from the Higher Education Commission of the Government of Pakistan.

During her time as a graduate student in the Department of the History of Art and Visual Studies at Cornell University, Shirazi was a recipient of a Junior Research Fellowship from the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, a Fulbright Award, two Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships, and travel and research grants from the Graduate School and Einaudi Center. In 2016, Shirazi was an artist-in-residence at Yaddo in New York, and in 2017 at Clark House Initiative in Bombay.

Shirazi was the Instructor for Curatorial Studies at the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program from 2018-2021 and has taught at Cooper Union, the New School and Parson's in the United States and National College of the Arts in Pakistan. Shirazi has curated exhibitions internationally, including *Soft and Wet* at Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, Project Space (New York, 2019), *welcome to what we took from is the state* at the Queens Museum (New York, 2016), and *Exhibition Without Objects* at Khoj International Artists' Association and The Drawing Room Gallery (New Delhi, 2013; Lahore, 2012). Her work has been shown internationally at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale (2018), Performance Space New York (2018), and the Devi Art Foundation in New Delhi (2013).

Shirazi has published articles in book chapters and edited volumes. Her peer-reviewed articles include "Returning to *Dialectics of Isolation:* The Non-Aligned Movement, Imperial Feminism and a Third Way," in *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* and one forthcoming in *The Journal for Curatorial Studies*. Shirazi is currently an ACLS Emerging Voices Postdoctoral Fellow at Johns Hopkins University.

For my mother

and her mother/(s) mother

&

For everyone

who lives in a country

that has destroyed the places from which you come or

that forbids you from speaking in your tongue

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throughout my field work abroad, and for his advocacy, care and support while I was off campus, and through the unprecedented challenges the COVID-19 pandemic wrought. Thanks, too, go to Jessica Smith and Sarah Blitz for all of their work. I took a seminar with and was a teaching assistant for two of María Fernández's courses, and learned from her pedagogy and rigorous syllabi. I thank María and Esra Akcan for their thoughtful scholarly comments and professional advice. My thanks also go to the librarians at Cornell Library for fielding my online requests, particularly during the pandemic. I completed some of my coursework at Columbia University with the support of two Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships across the Departments of Art History and Archaeology, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies, and the Institute for Research on Women, Gender, and Sexuality. Thank you to Alexander Alberro, Sudipta Kaviraj, Hassan Hussein, Saidiya Hartman and Neferti Tadiar.

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My dissertation is based on archival research and oral histories from across Pakistan, India, Bahrain, Britain, France, and the United States. This research and field work was supported by the American Institute of Pakistan Studies Junior Research Fellowship, a Fulbright Award, and travel and research grants from the History of Art and Visual Studies Department, the Graduate School, and the Einaudi Center. Before I began my PhD, I was visiting faculty at the National College of the Arts (NCA) in Lahore thanks to the support of a Short Term Faculty Hiring Program from the Government of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission. I learned invaluable lessons while I was at NCA from my art and architecture students, and conversations with artists, activists, and educators. I curated the first iteration of *Exhibition Without Objects (EwO)* then. The exhibition's premiere was supported by Sanam Taseer and its subsequent iteration by the inimitable Pooja Sood, with introductions made by Quddus Mirza and Alexis Bhagat, respectively. I am grateful for their support and enthusiasm for the unusual proposal of an exhibition that travels the world on a hard drive.

During my fieldwork in India, I was affiliated with the School of Art and Aesthetics (SAA) at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), supported by a Fulbright. I am grateful to my advisor, Shukla Sawant, for our conversations and her feedback as I

formulated and shared thoughts during my fieldwork. Thanks to Kavita Singh for her suggestions and support. Kalden Shringla and Neeraj Goswami at the Fulbright Delhi office were extremely helpful and attentive. Thanks, too, to the staff and faculty at the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) Languages Program in Lucknow. The excellent Ahtesham Khan ran a stellar program and went above and beyond his duties. I am thankful to Tabrez Ahmad, Summar Shoaib (and Auntie), Laurence Gautier and Harita Koya for their friendship, good company and humor that unforgettable summer and beyond. I fondly remember our visit to Ram Advani Bookseller's when we met the elegant, erudite man himself. Friends and interlocutors who extended their hospitality in extraordinary ways while I was in India include Bani Abidi, Vivek Rai, Priya Sen (and Lala), Ranbir and Reshmi Kaleka, Nidhi, Farah Ladhaboy, Hemant Sareen, Aditya Pande, Anjali Kamat (and Auntie), Srinivas Kuruganti, Uzma Mohsin, Nomaan Majid, Nada Raza, and the Clark House Collective (including Sumesh Sharma, Yogesh Barve, Saviya Lopes, and Shiva Gore).

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The pandemic has made it difficult to see loved ones, near and far. I owe a great debt to my family and the ways in which migration, border crossings, and displacement

have shaped our lives together and apart. Diaspora is uneven and varied, it is not a shared experience across generations, nor even within a single one, and in the experience of living it, each of us finds much that has been gained and lost. There is an irony in this work, which is that it has taken me far from the family and community of which I was a part, yet whose lives I have spent time examining and untangling in order to understand how it was we ended up here, as immigrants in the United States. In this search I have found a renewed investment in everyday life, and in forging worlds with like minded kin, rather than seeking some originary belonging through a place, people or language.

The lives of my family and extended family, spread across the US, Britain, Kenya, Pakistan, Sweden, and Canada, continue to teach me. My hope is that my writing opens itself to them and others who might find an echo through which their own stories of migration may resonate. I am grateful to my family in Lahore and Karachi for their good cheer and company, and for their support of my many "projects" as I traversed the city at all hours of the day: Cuckoo Mammu and Anees Mammi, Asad Ali, Fatima, Sakina, Khalu Aizaz and Khala Billo, Ashu Bhaji, Tito and Chottu Bhaijan. I owe much to my grandparents, though I did not get to spend much time with them. Each was born somewhere far from where they are buried and I experienced all of their deaths from afar. I am aware that a desire to bridge some of these distances with words draws me to this writing.

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Introduction

"Crazy" is written in red marker atop the envelope holding a letter that Syed Iqbal Geoffrey mailed to Alfred H. Barr, Jr. at his office in The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) (fig.1).[1] In it Geoffrey (1939-), the artist and lawyer, ends the pissing match he began in person when he urinated on the floor of Barr's office in 1963, retracting his promise to continue doing so atop Barr's grave after his death.[2] Barr (1902-1981), an art historian and the first appointed Director of MoMA, was still at the helm of one of the most influential art institutions in the world, in a city that had replaced Paris as the center of the "Western" art world when the two met. Through the postwar period, the United States was considered the sole inheritor of European modernist traditions and *the* new site of the avant-garde. This discursive narrative of art paralleled the ascendancy of the United States over Western Europe, particularly the United Kingdom, as a neo-imperial power from the 1940s onwards through the second world war, and beyond the end of the Cold War

[1] The word "crazy" was added by a MoMA employee. Margaret Scolari Barr Papers, Sub-series II: General Correspondence, 1925-1987, II.149, "Syed Iqbal Geoffrey," in The Museum of Modern Art Archives, 1978.

[2] Syed Iqbal Geoffrey, in conversation with the author, New York City, May 4, 2018. The detail regarding pissing on the floor during the meeting was relayed to the author by Geoffrey.

period, when it eclipsed the then U.S.S.R. to become an unrivaled superpower—a position it continues to hold to the present day.[3]

Modernism was used as a "weapon of the cold war"[4] and abstraction was part of its capitalist arsenal.[5] The postwar United States used art as soft power in its battle to counter the influence of communism across the world, particularly across the newly independent nations. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), for example, covertly funded African and Asian artists and non-aligned, "Third

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[3] Barr held the immensely influential position of the first director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from 1929 when it first opened its doors to the public until 1943, after which he was given an office to continue working at the museum in an advisory capacity, as part of the MoMA's International Program.

[4] The MoMA was founded in 1929 by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller whose son Nelson Rockefeller became president of the museum in 1939 and was also appointed as the Roosevelt administration's coordination of inter-Americas affairs. Rockefeller was replaced by John Hay Whitney (founders of the Whitney Museum of American Art) in 1941. In a press release from that period the Museum considered itself "A Weapon of National Defense" promoting "Pan-Americanism" through Latin America. MoMA Press Release, February 28, 1941, New York City. Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 1929-1959, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

[5] MoMA Press Release, February 28, 1941 (Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 1929-1959, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York City). The MoMA was founded in 1929 by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, whose son Nelson Rockefeller became president of the museum in 1939; Nelson was also appointed as the Roosevelt administration's coordinator of inter-Americas affairs. Rockefeller was replaced by John Hay Whitney (founder of the Whitney Museum of American Art) in 1941. In a press release from that period the Museum considered itself "A Weapon of National Defense" promoting "Pan-Americanism" through Latin America.

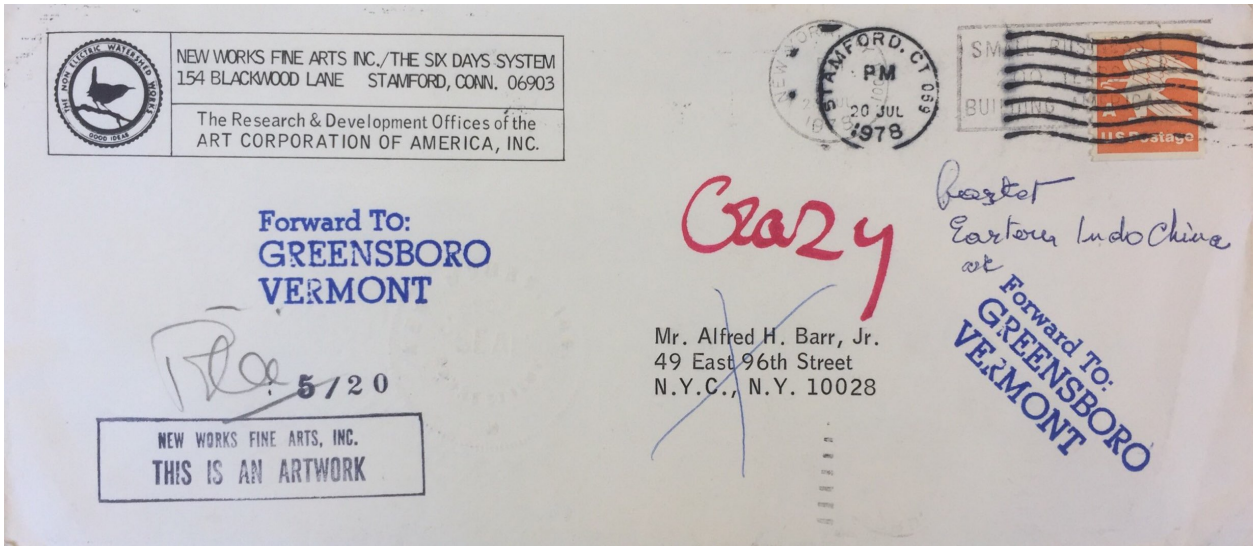

FIGURE 1. SYED IQBAL GEOFFREY, LETTER FROM THE ARTIST TO ALFRED H. BARR, JR. (1979), MARGARET SCOLARI BARR PAPERS IN THE MOMA ARCHIVES

Worldist" literary magazines through its "Congress for Cultural Freedom,"[6] and its support of Abstract Expressionism, with the MoMA, is well documented.[7] Barr had curated the traveling exhibition *The New American Painting* in 1958, which transformed artists such as Jackson Pollock, Philip Guston, Frank Kline, and Willem de Kooning, amongst others, into unwitting "ambassadors" of American

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[6] These publications included the magazines: *Hiwar and Adab* (Beirut), *Encounter* (London), *Quest* (Bombay), *Black Orpheus* (Ibadan) and *Transition* (Kampala), amongst others. This does not mean to imply or otherwise support the simplistic conclusion that funding by the CIA rendered the journals or the writers only agents of empire, nor does it deride their contributions to literary culture or Third Worldism, as the youth say today "it's complicated." In an interview between Achal Prabhala and Michael Vazquez, Prabhala says, "CIA didn't kill *Quest.* Indira Gandhi did." Michael C. Vazquez, "The Behest of Quest," *Bidoun: Art and Culture of the Middle East,* Issue 26: "Soft Power" (2011). See also: Nida Ghouse, "*Lotus* Notes," *ARTMargins* 5, no. 3 (October 2016): 82-92; Hala Halim, "Afro-Asian Third-Worldism into Global South: The Case of *Lotus* Journal," *Global South Studies: A Collective Publication with The Global South* (November 2017), https://globalsouthstudies.as.virginia.edu/key-moments/afro-asian-third-worldism-global-south-case-lotus-journal; Elizabeth M. Holt, "Al-Tayyib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North,* the CIA, and the Cultural Cold War after Bandung," *Research in African Literatures* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2019).

[7] The CIA was founded in 1947, the same year as the partition and independence of British India. For scholarship on the Cold War and Abstract Expressionism, see: David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Serge Guilbaut, ed. *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal, 1945-1964* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

modern art.[8] The large scale, expressive, gestural work of action painting was conflated with white, male painters and American democratic values of "freedom" and "individualism"—in contrast with movements such as Social Realism, which was represented as if artists working in Communist and Socialist countries simply made art in service of the state.[9] In India, a narrative form of figurative painting was canonized as the national-modern style of artists in the newly independent nation.[10] In contrast, in Pakistan, where Geoffrey was from, modernism had a more vexed relationship to nationalism.[11]

Barr used maps and timelines to reinforce the narrative that white American artists were taking up the mantle of the European avant-garde. While *New American Painting* was accompanied by a mural-size world map showing the global reach of the International Program, under which the show was organized, Barr had first used this technique of a diagram or map in his exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*

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[8] *The New American Painting as Shown in Eight European Countries 1958-1959* traveled across Europe and was then exhibited at MoMA from May 28-September 8, 1959. See Press Release, No. 45, Thursday, May 28, 1959, Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Records, 1929-1959 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art Archives).

[9] For more on the racial and sexual biases in the promotion of these Abstract Expressionist artists and a theorization of the work of marginalized racial and sexual minorities, contemporaries who were working in the same style, such as Romare Bearden, Lousie Bourgeois, and more, see: Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Kobena Mercer, *Discrepant Abstraction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

[10] For scholarship on modernism in India, see: Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice In India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000); Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930-1990* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

[11] Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010): 12, 31.

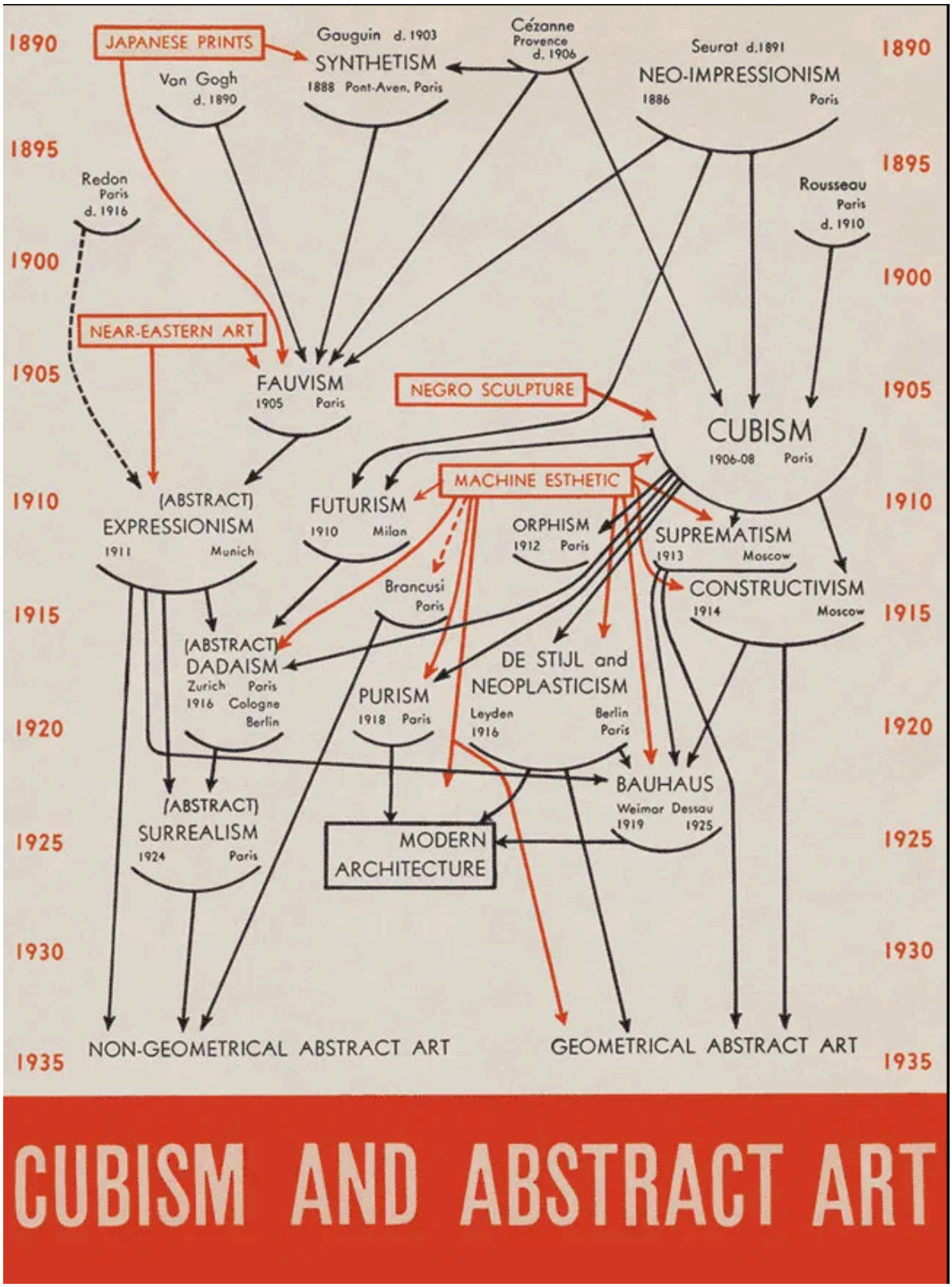

FIGURE 2. ALFRED BARR, DIAGRAM AND COVER OF THE CATALOGUE FOR *CUBISM AND ABSTRACT ART* (1936)

in 1936, which included a wide range of work such as painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, furniture, architecture, theatre, posters, and even films.[12] The graphic diagram includes a timeline of European Modernism (1890-1935) along with movements before and after Cubism, including Fauvism, the Bauhaus, and Abstract Expressionism (fig. 2). In his catalogue essay Barr juxtaposes abstraction with naturalism, noting that abstraction was a response to "the pictorial *conquest* of the external visual world [that] had been completed and refined many times and in different ways during the previous half millennium"—in Europe, no doubt.[13] As a result, "the more adventurous and original artists had grown bored with painting *facts*. By a common and powerful impulse many of them were driven to abandon the imitation of natural appearances."[14]

Naturalism, which Barr was situating modern, avant-garde Western European artists against, was the foundation of British colonial art education across South Asia. The British had established art schools as part of their colonial apparatus, including The Government School of Art in Calcutta, Bengal— then the capital of British India—in 1854, along with the Madras School in Madras, the Sir JJ

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[12] The map illustrates the "the entire scope of the Museum's exchange program…" See: Press release, No. 45, 1959. For photographs of the installation see: MoMA Archive, May 28, 1959–September 8, 1959, Photographic Archive (New York: The Museum of Modern Art Archives), IN645.1.

[13] Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "Introduction," *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: MoMA, 1939): 11 (italics added). This echoes British colonial art academicism and pedagogy across the art schools established by the British during the Raj.

[14] Ibid (italics added).

School of Art in Bombay in 1857, and, lastly, The Mayo School in Lahore in 1878.[15] Anti-colonial modernist movements, such as the Bengal School or the work of the artist Abdur Rahman Chughtai, for example, were oriented against and in resistance to naturalism as an aesthetic associated with colonialism—not through modes of abstraction as Barr narrated them, but through a reintegration of art into everyday life; a valorization of "craft," which had been denigrated by British colonial art education and placed below "fine arts"; and explorations of "traditional" techniques and subject matter, however fraught those categories were.

This binary schema by which Barr's "facts" were seen and represented in realism, and in which abstraction was juxtaposed against naturalism, continues to structure discourses around abstraction in Europe and the United States and across the global south, undergirded by Hegelian epistemological frameworks of art history.[16] Nishitani Osamu describes the dialectical logic of the subject and object in Hegel's theory of absolute knowledge through a critique of its use of the analogues

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[15] Foundations were also started by Indians, such as Gaganendranath Tagore and Abanindranath Tagore, who founded The Indian Society of Oriental Art (ISOA) in 1907, and were later part of the Bengal School, as well as collectives that reflected artists' complex negotiations with concepts such as nationalism, modernism, anti-colonialism, and aesthetic form. See Regina Bittner and Kathrin Rhomberg, eds., *Bauhaus in Calcutta: An Encounter of the Cosmopolitan Avant*-Garde, exhibition catalogue (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013).

[16] In his lectures on aesthetics Hegel traces a developmental transformation of natural (Greek) style into historical (Christian) style. See Robert Wick, "Hegel's Aesthetics: An Overview," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 348-377.

of “humanitas" and “anthropos,” which we can use to decode Barr's diagram.[17] In it, the European subject, or humanitas, produces subjective knowledge, it creates *and* innovates—it invents abstraction, for example—while anthropos, or what he describes as “Negro Sculpture,” exists only as an object of study. “Africans” are capable of production in the first degree but incapable of producing knowledge subjectively in the second degree; their sculptures are the raw material for appropriation by humanitas to then produce knowledge, or “Cubism.” These analogues extend to the classification of “Western” knowledge and the configuration of disciplines in the academy, as Naoki Sakai observes: “The unity of the West seems to bestow a sense of coherence upon the configuration of disciplines in the humanities. It serves to mark a distinction between the areas and peoples that can be objects of ethnic and area studies and those that cannot.”[18] In art history, non-western abstraction has been historically approached as anthropos, therefore excluded from study as “art,” and Euro-American abstraction as humanitas, although a rich body of recent scholarship now exists devoted to the study of abstraction by non-western artists, and marginalized diasporic artists in Western Europe and the United States. Yet, in order to avoid the liberal calculus of

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[17] Nishitani Osamu, “Anthropos and Humanitas: Two Western Concepts of ‘Human Being,’” trans. Trent Maxey, in *traces: a multilingual series of cultural theory and translation: Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference,* ed. Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006): 265-267.

[18] Naoki Sakai, “Dislocation of the West and the Status of the Humanities,” in *Unpacking Europe,* ed. Salah M. Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2001): 197.

inclusion that keeps categories intact and opens the door to a few artists in order to diversify existing canons,[19] while keeping the canon intact and epistemological categories largely unchallenged, art made by "people who were oppressed and whose languages were robbed as a result of the dominating desire of knowledge,"[20] suggests the the imperative of rethinking the concept of canonization—and of decolonizing the persistent Euro-American epistemologies that undergird the racist and imperialist classificatory systems of art history.[21]

Perhaps Geoffrey, who was only twenty-four at the time, was pissing on American imperialism. Or maybe he was engaging in institutional critique of the inordinate power wielded by a curator at the MoMA. Although Barr became a target of the artist, Barr was in fact largely responsible for the collection of non-western artists that were recently brought out of storage and interspersed in the MoMA's fifth-flour galleries in what it called its "Travel Ban Rehang," mounted in response to the forty-fifth president's 2017 executive order that blocked travelers from seven Muslim-majority nations from entering the United States.[22] The works

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[19] Pepe Karmel, *Abstract Art: A Global History* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2020). Karmel's recent book centers on this model of inclusion and an attempt to render abstraction universal, tracing it over a 100 year global history from 1915-2015.

[20] Osamu, "Anthropos and Humanitas," 269.

[21] "We will be unable to liberate knowledge regarding human beings from its unilateral and oppressive structure unless we clarify the kinds of structures and restraints it places upon our knowledge." Osamu, "Anthropos and Humanitas," 270.

[22] "2017: Travel Ban Rehang," MoMA Through Time, Museum of Modern Art, https://www.moma.org/interactives/moma_through_time/2010/travel-ban-re-hang/.

of abstract artists such as Ibrahim El-Salahi, Marcos Grigorian, and Parviz Tanavoli were the very works that were acquired for the MoMA by Barr in the 1960s. While the question of what happened between the 1960s and the 2000s to MoMA's commitments to internationalism as the US ascended into an imperial superpower is important, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Some pressing questions remain: why did these artists not inflect Barr's understanding of the transcultural influence of non-western aesthetics on Euro-American modernism? Why did he excise these artists, who were working with abstraction, from the oft-reproduced diagram of cubism and abstract art? El-Salahi's painting *The Mosque* (1964), for example, is an important work made while he was living in New York after receiving a Rockefeller Foundation grant; it is an early, abstract work of El-Salahi's that registers the influence that New York's Black and abstract art movements had on the artist.[23] Although these international and diasporic non-western artists were acquired by the museum, they were still excluded from its histories of modernism and abstraction.[24]

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[23] For more scholarship on Ibrahim El-Salahi, see: Salah M. Hassan, "Ibrahim El Salahi's 'Prison Notebook': A Visual Memoir," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 1 (2010): 197-219; Salah M. Hassan, ed., *Ibrahim El-Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012); Iftikhar Dadi, "Ibrahim El Salahi and Calligraphic Modernism in a Comparative Perspective," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 555-576.

[24] For a study of artist Ernst Mancoba, a Black South African exile who was a founding member of COBRA in Denmark but was excised from historical narratives of this avant-garde postwar movement, see: Salah M. Hassan "African Modernism: Beyond Alternative Modernities Discourse," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 451-473; and Rasheed Araeen, "Modernity, Modernism, and Africa's Place in the History of Art of Our Age," *Third Text* 19, no. 4 (2005): 411-417.

A precocious, young, upper-caste artist and lawyer from Pakistan, Syed Iqbal Geoffrey was born in Chiniot, in pre-partition British India, and grew up in postcolonial Lahore. He lived, studied, and worked in Cambridge (Massachusetts), London, Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles before returning to Lahore in the early 1980s.[25] Geoffrey had traveled to New York after mounting a series of successful solo shows in London, perhaps expecting a warmer reception from the United States than he received. In a 1963 review in *ArtForum International*, James Monte admires the small gouache paintings and ink drawings in Geoffrey's exhibition that have a "strong graphic quality enhanced by a natural spontaneity," and notes that the artist had been propelled into the London art world by a previous, successful first solo show.[26] He also mentions Geoffrey's use of "Sanskrit writing" along with "mandala symbols" and "Arabic design motifs," grossly misreading the images, of which one, Geoffrey's palimpsestic assemblage *Conversation* (1962), is printed alongside the review. Its loose, sweeping gestural brushstrokes include circular and linear shapes, while sentences in Nastaliq Urdu

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[25] Geoffrey was disbarred from practicing law in Chicago in October 1982. The Attorney General and Disciplinary Commission filed a complaint against "Syed Mohammed Jawaid Iqbal Jafree" for professional misconduct: "The complaint alleged that respondent instituted numerous defamatory and frivolous lawsuits, appeals and administrative actions." The case also notes that the attorney "also sued unnamed parties under the fictitious name 'Judgeso N. Thetake.'" In re Jaffree, 93 Ill. 2d 450 (Ill. 1982) 444 N.E.2d 143. Geoffrey / Jafree returned to Lahore and continued to work as a lawyer and artist, combining the two into a performative practice by bringing lawsuits to the Lahore High Court. Highlights include a lawsuit against the Hayward Gallery for racial discrimination and a suit against Queen Elizabeth II for the Koh-i-Noor diamond, in which the artist's name is modified to Javed Iqbal Jaffry. See: "Artist Sues Hayward Gallery for Racial Discrimination," *ArtForum*, January 17, 2005; "Pakistan lawyer files for return of Koh-i-Noor Diamond," *BBC News*, December 4, 2015.

[26] James Monte, "Iqbal Geoffrey: Lewis and Vidal Gallery," *ArtForum International,* April 1963: 16-17.

script run across the top and bottom of the image (not Arabic design motifs). A series of repeated, sans-serif letters of the English alphabet, in all caps, make their own square shapes, while some Urdu sentences and English letters are nestled in the interior of a few painterly lines. In the early 1960s, at the same time that abstract expressionism was vaunted and its American artists celebrated, Geoffrey, a Pakistani, was working gesturally in the same vein albeit drawing from some references illegible to Monte and Barr. After a charged meeting with Barr in New York, Geoffrey, now twenty-six, tried his luck on the west coast. In a review of Geoffrey's 1965 show in Los Angeles, William Wilson makes this explicit. "The artist used to perform in the tone of such European Abstract Expressionists as Mathieu or Soulages," he writes. "He brought to his art a sense of calligraphy and personal extroversion that was bright and elegant."[27] It bears mentioning that calligraphy, which is a significant part of this dissertation, is notably excluded from Hegel's categorization of aesthetics and from Euro-American hierarchies of fine art.[28]

I begin with this story of Geoffrey to describe the political stakes of claims to abstraction by postcolonial and diasporic artists, and also to juxtapose Geoffrey's masculinist performativity in the face of his perception of Barr's disinterest—his

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[27] William Wilson, "Iqbal Geoffrey: Adele Bednarz Gallery," *ArtForum,* Summer 1965: 16.

[28] Hegel's categorization of the arts include architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. See Wick, "Hegel's aesthetics." Wick translated and drew from the German lectures on aesthetics from *G.W.F. Hegel Werke in zwanzig Banden* (Sukrkamp Verlag, 1970) Volumes XIII, XIV, and XV.

aggressively phallic yet not unhumorous gesture—with the radically different responses of three other artists of his generation to a related predicament of violence and exclusion. For the three women artists who are the focus of this dissertation, the art world—consisting of critics, curators, museums, and galleries—was not a primary site of resistance or of validation, and I argue that they, unlike Geoffrey, constitute a collective futurity. Although I read Geoffrey's actions as oppositional and resistant, situated between performance and a form of institutional critique, in a fight against an imbalance of power and ongoing neocolonial structures, his practice bears little relation to how the three women artists at the center of this dissertation respond to injustice, violence and being invisibilized in their contexts of Pakistan, India, and the United States. These artists' indefatigable practices and life long engagement with art, activism, and pedagogy bear testament to the ubiquitous power of everyday social life as feminist praxis in engaged resistance to colonial epistemologies of knowledge and neo-traditional postcolonial aesthetics. The works and careers of these three artists and their fugitive abstraction are the focus of this dissertation.

MINOR FIGURES

During their lifetimes, Zarina (1937-2020), Nasreen Mohamedi (1937-1990), and Lala Rukh (1948-2017) were never exhibited together nor even extensively

written about, which makes it impossible to trace them back to any single place, encounter, exhibition, manifesto, or text. Unlike the Lahore Art Circle, the Women Artists of Pakistan Manifesto, the Progressive Artists' Group, Group 1890, or the the Kerala Radicals, they did not live in the same city and were not a collective, nor did they write treatises or manifestos together. Their investment in abstraction cannot be traced back to a germinal exhibition that they were part of or even an institutional discourse in either India or Pakistan.[29] Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh were making work that was out of joint with their times, in minor forms and in media that were largely marginalized and undervalued in the communities of which they were a part, including the male modernists in New Delhi, the Baroda School where Mohamedi taught, the feminist art movement in Lahore, and the second wave feminist art and activist movement in New York City. These artists differed from their white feminist counterparts in Western Europe and the United States particularly in their emphasis on anti-imperial and minoritarian issues, yet they differed, too, from other South Asian women artists across Pakistan and India,

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[29] The seven point "Women Artists Manifesto" was not published at the time it was drafted in 1983, during General Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship in Pakistan, out of a concern for the safety of the artists. Its signatories include the artists Abbasi Abidi, Mehr Afroze, Talat Ahmed, Veeda Ahmed, Sheherezade Alam, Riffat Alvi, Mamoona Bashir, Salima Hashmi, Birjees Iqbal, Zubaida Javed, Jalees Nagee, Nahid, Qudsia Nisar, Lala Rukh, and Rabia Zuberi. It is reproduced in full in Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003): 193-195. Salima Hashmi writes: "In 1983, a group of women artists in Lahore, Pakistan got together to draft a manifesto for themselves. The manifesto was never made public, but the act of getting together was symbolic of something that women painters had been conscious of for some time—that the political and social oppression imposed by the regime then in power, although it applied to all sections of society, was directed especially towards women." See: Salima Hashmi, "Country Paper - Pakistan," Asia Art Archive, New Delhi, https://cdn.aaa.org.hk/_source/women-manifesto.pdf.

fault-lines existed in regards to caste, race, and religion but also in terms of form. These artists made and exhibited their abstract work in interlocution with friends, colleagues, and students; they were actively engaged in their respective contexts, either with Indian modernisms, the transnational South Asian women's movement or the Third World women's movement in the United States.[30] They also committed personal acts of resistance and refusal that I read as embedded in a mode of sociality that constitutes an aesthetic and political-economic re-engendering of concepts of gender, postcolonial modernism, the postcolonial nation state, and race. I contend that these artists' works, although formally distinct from the work produced by feminist artist in their respective contexts of India, Pakistan and the United States, are part of an untold history of minor figures engaged in feminist and queer praxes of decolonization.

The three artists were born and raised across postcolonial South Asia and incorporated precolonial art and aesthetics from across the region, while also sampling from the complex inheritances of colonial modernity and postwar art movements. What does it mean then to draw these three artists together and describe them as part of a transnational, transregional, and transcultural movement

[30] For more on Zarina and her participation in the Third World Women's movement in New York, see: Sadia Shirazi, "Returning to Dialectics of Isolation: The Non-Aligned Movement, Imperial Feminism, and a Third Way," *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2021), https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.11426.

of fugitive abstraction?[31] In part, I argue that these three were minor artists whom I draw together due to their status as differentiated minoritarian subjects whose works do not seek to represent identity but instead conjure futurities.[32] In looking at the formal resonances of their work across multiple sites, I trouble the opposition of schools of art and individual artists, and draw the individual artists' work and practice together with histories of anti-colonial, resistant, and radical politics. Therefore, Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh take on a collective enunciation in this dissertation as part of an internationalist project that endeavors to refuse the territorial borders of the postcolonial nation state's of Pakistan and India, its imaginal borders, and attendant traumatic foreclosures of history and memory across South Asia and its diaspora. Another investment is in bringing these artists into circulation and citation in histories of art and decolonization from which they are often excluded due to their work's formalism. Read through their socio-historical context, I argue that they were engaged in forms of sociality and reproductive labor that are often invisibilized in histories of art and activism, and that they articulate other futures and imaginaries for political action beyond the

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[31] A question that persists in this dissertation is in regards to the constellation of artists it draws together: Are there other artists who might also be included in this attempt to theorize fugitive abstraction emblematized by a group of artworks?

[32] The use of "minor" here draws from the work on minor literature by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and from Saidiya Hartman's examination of minor figures, amongst other scholarship. See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literatur*e, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Robert Brinkley, "What is a Minor Literature?," *Mississippi Review* 11, no. 3, Essays Literary Criticism (Winter/Spring, 1983): 13-33; Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019)

binaries of nationalism and anti-imperialism, continuing the project of what Vijay Prashad, citing Frantz Fanon, called a "third way," while inflecting it towards postcolonial feminist and queer praxes.[33]

Zarina and Lala Rukh only had a modicum of international recognition towards the end of their lives, while Mohamedi's was posthumous. All three artists were out of joint with dominant artistic movements, marginalized due to the abstract nature of their work, or because they refused to work in line with either the predominant forms of postcolonial modernism or figural, feminist art movements of their time. The three artists worked primarily at a small scale, in black and white, on paper (fig.3).

Their lives also share some biographical similarities. They traveled extensively, never had children, and made their artwork quietly and indefatigably despite whether or not they received public, critical acclaim. Two of the artists, Zarina and Lala Rukh, dropped their patrilineal surnames in what I read as a feminist act and critique of patriarchy, whereas Mohamedi declined to show in

[33] Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), xv. This is not the "third way" as a triangulation, as it would soon be articulated by neoliberalism during the Clinton years in the United States, nor is it the centrism of Blair in Britain. A special thank you to Mezna Qato for this insight.

exhibitions of "women artists," which I read retrospectively as a feminist act.[34] Historians wonder why it was that Mohamedi engaged in an abstract drawing practice that seemed singularly at odds with the work of all artists in Baroda and had no relation to the work of other Indian women artists of the time, such as her peers Nilima Sheikh, Madhvi Parekh, and Arpita Singh. Though she was a mentor to the younger artist Nalani Malani, she refused her invitation to participate in the traveling show *Through the Looking Glass* due to its use of the moniker "women artists."[35] This refusal of the gendered qualifier with the title "artist" is a decidedly feminist response, a refusal to be qualified by gender and to demand to be called an artist at a time when her field was dominated by men. While Zarina was widowed in her thirties, Mohamedi and Lala Rukh never married and lived alone, which was unusual for women of their class and caste backgrounds in India and Pakistan and even the United States at the time, aided by family wealth in the case of Mohamedi and Lala Rukh, who

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[34] Both Zarina and Lala Rukh dropped their marital and family surnames, of Hashmi and Khan, respectively, a gesture of refusal that is also a disruption of patriarchal conventions of naming women as private property. Although Zarina is sometimes referred to by her previous surname, she preferred to be referred to by her first name but did not police people's choice of naming her. Lala Rukh did insist upon the use of only her first name, which is also sometimes spelled Lalarukh, although she is referred to in this dissertation as Lala Rukh, and also not as Lala, as she was often affectionately addressed by friends. Lala Rukh dropped her family surname when she returned to Pakistan after completing her studies at the University of Chicago in 1977 while Zarina dropped her surname after returning to India in 1968 from Paris, where she had apprenticed at the printmaking studio *Atelier 17,* and during the dissolution of her marriage. Throughout the dissertation Zarina and Lala Rukh will be referred to by their preferred names, whereas Nasreen Mohamedi will be referred to subsequently by her surname, Mohamedi, as is the convention.

[35] This was an exhibition of watercolors organized by Nalini Malani that included the work of Malani, Madhvi Parekh, Nilima Sheikh and Arpita Singh, in which the artists placed their easily transportable work in a suitcase and exhibited it across India. Conversation with Nilima Sheikh, Baroda, August 2017. On "women artists" see Grant Watson, "Nasreen Mohamedi: Passage and Placement," *Afterall: A Journal of Art* 21 (July 2009): 34.

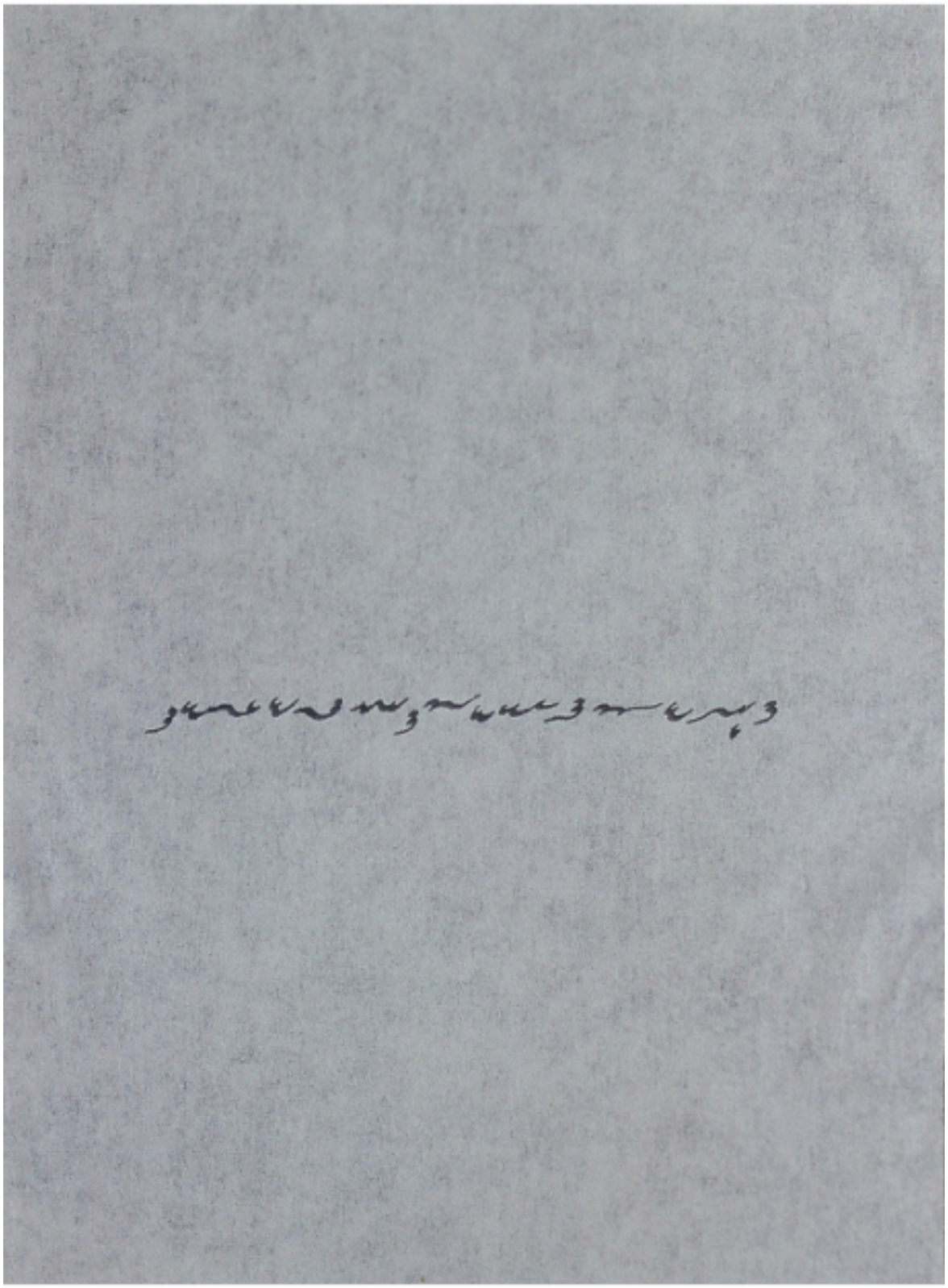

FIGURE 3. LALA RUKH, *HIEROGLYPHICS I: KOI ASHIQ KISI MEHBOOBA SE 1* (1995). DETAIL

inherited property.[36] All three artists worked as art educators throughout their careers with deep pedagogical investments. I will expand upon such biographic details in subsequent chapters as it offers us insight into women's lives and experiences that are not yet found in postcolonial histories and that give us insight into the challenges that these women identifying artists faced living in resistance to societal norms and expectations. I read their resistance through both queer and feminist methods, clarifying this usage through an explication of differences between methods and the objects or people they are used to analyze. In their respective contexts of India, Pakistan, and the United States the three artists are recognized as having some affiliation with one another through form yet they remain elusive figures who are not yet historicized adequately, nor considered as constitutive of a feminist, migratory movement of fugitive abstraction that I argue is part of an overlooked history of art and decolonization (fig.4).

THAT LINE IS DRAWN ON MY HEART: ABSTRACTION AND AFFECT

[36] Mohamedi's family had considerable wealth as did Lala Rukh's, from whom she inherited property and was able to live and work from her studio and home. Zarina was unable to access the pension due to her after she was widowed without returning to India, and faced financial hardship in the United States. All three artists were social, with networks of friends and family, worked in art education, which provided them financial support and were part of communities that sustained their work and with whom they were in conversation. To say they worked in isolation reflects more on the ways in which their work was marginalized and misunderstood.

I didn't have to look at the map; that line is drawn on my heart.[37]
—Zarina

Countless stories lurk in an arch.[38]
—Naiyer Masud

This dissertation is about abstraction, a largely overlooked but important part of the history of art across South Asia during the second half of the 20th century. It focuses on three peripatetic artists on whom little scholarship exists——Zarina, Nasreen Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh—women who were working with modes of abstraction transnationally, across post-independence Pakistan, India, the Indian Ocean, and its diasporic extensions in postwar France, Britain, Japan, and the United States from the 1960s through the 1990s. The dissertation investigates the artists' shared approach to aesthetic form that links the traumatic partition of the Indian subcontinent with practices of decolonization, transformations of space and architecture, and the affective registers of diasporic and imaginal dislocations that resulted. I demonstrate how Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh's works negotiate multiple temporalities and languages, both visual and textual, foregrounding themes of migration, diaspora, racialization, belonging, and sexual difference.

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[37] Zarina, *Zarina Hashmi: Recent Work*, Gallery Espace (New Delhi, 2011), exhibition catalogue.

[38] Asif Farrukhi, "A Conversation with Naiyer Masud," trans. Muhammad Umar Memon, *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 12 (1997): 271.

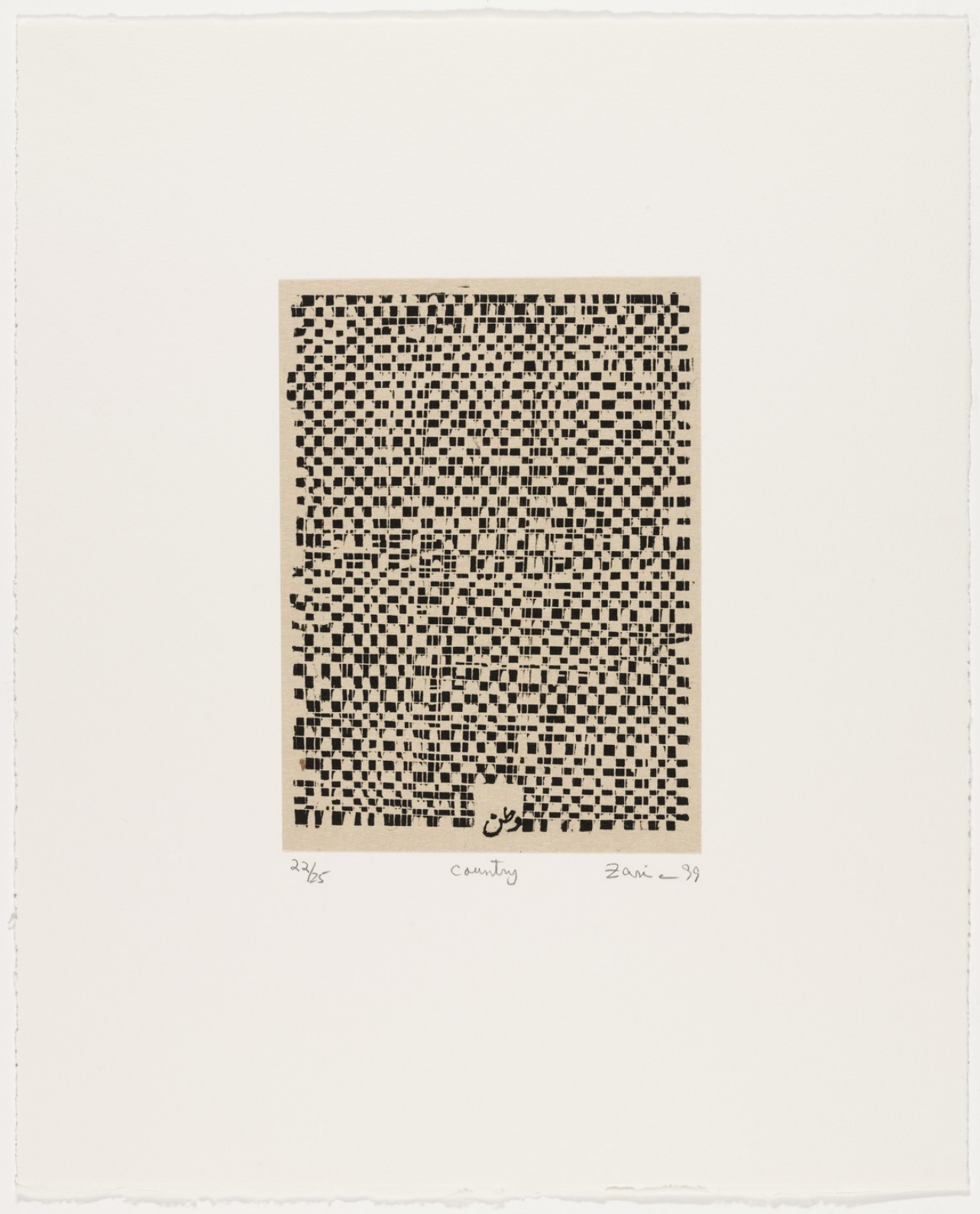

FIGURE 4. ZARINA, *WATAN/COUNTRY* FROM *HOME IS A FOREIGN PLACE* (1999). DETAIL.

Rather than situate these artists solely within postwar Euro-American abstraction, a nebulous category they are often subsumed under, I contend that their work constitutes a decolonial, feminist praxis that is largely untheorized. I demonstrate how these artists negotiated the fraught inheritances of modernism by reframing early modern art and architectural aesthetics as a site of postcolonial feminist reclamation. These artists draw precolonial aesthetics together with postwar, process-based experiments in drawing, assemblage, photography, printmaking, and sculpture. "Fugitive" in the dissertation title, brings the methodologies of Black studies together with postcolonial and translation theory, as well as feminist and queer theory, to analyze a form of abstraction in these artists' works that is a transgression of nationalist reconfigurations of postcolonial representation—of the post-independence nation-state, the sanctity of territorial boundaries, and the gendered narratives of home and homeland.

By examining their artworks and practices through three monographic chapters, I identify the ways in which these three artists rework early modern aesthetics as a site of postcolonial feminist reclamation and recovery. I demonstrate how Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh negotiate the fraught inheritance of colonial modernism by reframing pre-colonial and modern Indo-Persian art and architectural aesthetics—Mughal architecture, Nastaliq calligraphy, miniature painting, and Urdu poetry—by drawing them together with Euro-American

postwar, feminist, process-based, aleatory experiments with materiality. Focusing on the artists' work in drawing, assemblage, printmaking, photography, calligraphy, and sculpture, I demonstrate that postcolonial feminine subjectivity is always fragmentary, constructed and reconstructed alongside its associations with home, national belonging, language, and gender. Rather than returning to the body of woman as a site of difference in their work, I contend that these three artists resisted its representation in order to avoid its reinscription into sites of degradation and excess. While abstraction sometimes connotes ideas outside of embodiment that reflect mind-body dualism, I situate these artists' practices beyond dualism, arguing that they turn their feminist inquiry to modes of abstraction that explore affect, hapticality, temporality, and materiality. Their work refuses representation as a project of visuality tethered to stable identities.

This resistance to particular representational modes of figuration extended to the artists' refusal to reify the territorial and imaginal boundaries of the postcolonial nation-states of India and Pakistan. In opposition to representations of anti-colonial and postcolonial modern "national culture," in which the nation (millat, qaum or rashtra) and homeland (watan or bharat) were differently gendered in Pakistan and India through literature and art, I will explore the ways in which these artists' works trouble the patriarchal conflation of land with the woman's body, figural representations of women as sites of the continuation of

tradition, and invocations of the territorial boundaries of the nation-state or homolinguality to reify notions of a people or a homeland.[39] I contend that these three artists redefine home and belonging and refuse partition's gendered and territorial borders through their work, revealing its racialization and suturing its cartographic cuts to redirect us elsewhere—to the Oceanic, in Mohamedi's work, by resisting gender binaries through sexual differentiation in Lala Rukh's, and through haptic, migratory abstraction in Zarina's—thereby offering us imaginaries and modes of belonging distinct from masculinist modernism and postcolonial nationalism.

Abstraction, it must be said, is not always fugitive. What I call *fugitive abstraction* is theorized as unstable in its visual representation. It is not about the domestication of anti-colonial struggle into a postcolonial national modern form but is an articulation that moves through the everyday improvisation of riyaaz, a Hindi-Urdu term drawn from Hindustani classical music to describe a daily

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[39] Not foregrounding the nation distinguishes these artists from modernist movements in India and Egypt which also looked to pre-colonial art and architecture to create new aesthetic forms, but foregrounded the nation as a form of modernity itself. On the Indian national/modern conjunction, see: Kapur, *When Was Modernism in Indian Art?*. On Egyptian modernist movements, Salah Hassan writes, "at that time, a new generation of Egyptian artists, driven by the fervor of the nationalist and anticolonial movements led by nationalist leaders such as Saad Zaghloul, turned to ancient Egyptian art and architecture in their search for a new visual vocabulary to express their urge for a modernist and secular vision to foreground the nation as a modern project." Hassan, "African Modernism," 459.

A note regarding italicization: I do not italicize words that are in languages other than English or other Romance languages in this dissertation in order to refuse to adhere to conventions that privilege one language, English, over all others, following the work of scholars of comparative literature and poets working with multiple languages who are working on forms that do not hierarchize or assume a hierarchy or dominance of languages of their readers in English.

practice. The line, the cut, figure and ground, shadow and light, are all signified through this improvisational practice, or riyaaz, in works that are not seen as much as they are felt. Fugitivity resides in the impossibility of representing postcolonial feminine subjectivity within regimes of visual representation, an instability between translation that is found in Zarina's *Home is a Foreign Place* (2002), where the artist translates words in Urdu translates into what she called her "idea-images" while also creating multiple counter-translations that exceed literary understandings of reading and writing. Lala Rukh's drawing series *Hieroglyphics I: Koi ashiq kisi mehbooba se 1* (1995) also resembles writing but is not in any legible script. These sinuous forms cannot be read and instead approximate the nonverbal vocal form of the tarana in Hindustani classical music—a form of composition which tangles and untangles through sound, a vocality that is also not articulated as words through language, but as vocal choreographies of nonverbal speech—pulsing and extending across multiple visual frames. Mohamedi's numinous black and white photographs trouble linear progressions of time, they conjure the multiple temporalities of postcoloniality and trace transformations of postcolonial landscapes. One untitled abstract photograph seems to superimpose the sail of a single dhow, an icon of premodern Indian Ocean trade, atop a desert landscape transformed by crude oil extraction in Kuwait.

This translation of theorizations of fugitivity from Black studies to postcolonial studies extends concepts of race and racialization to postcolonial South Asia and its diaspora, to help us think through concepts of ethno-racialized difference and issues of migration, exile, belonging, and sexual difference. I refer to translation as an act of bridging and a site that negotiates differences of thought and sociality, following Naoki Sakai. He observes: "When we think about translation as our response to nonsense, or discontinuity in our social world, then translation becomes a much more fundamental activity where human beings create social relationships with other human beings."[40] In Sakai's explication "the schematism of co-figuration" and "the regime of translation" are not simply described by the representation of one national language into another, but the act of translation itself constitutes the unity of representations of language.[41] This means that translation is formed from multiplicity through the labor of the translator, and passes through forms of unintelligibility and incomprehensibility that cannot be reduced to untranslatability.[42] Sakai maps the emergence of a national language onto the imagining of a people into a collectivity through a shared language: "In other words, a nation is presented as a society that is

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[40] Mattea Cussel, "In Conversation: Naoki Sakai," *Asymptote* (blog), June 21, 2018, https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/2018/06/21/in-conversation-naoki-sakai/.

[41] Naoki Sakai, "Translation and the Figure of the Border: Towards the Apprehension of Translation as a Social Action," *Profession* (2010): 25-34.

[42] Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Naoki Sakai, "The Modern Regime of Translation and the Emergence of the Nation," *The Eighteenth Century* 58, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 105-108.

naturally unified because of given ethnic heritage from the past. It is no accident that, even in the twenty-first century, the name of a nationalist or ethnicity coincides with that of a language."[43] If Euro-American art histories of the avant-garde deploy a theory of history that Fred Moten observes is embedded in "a particular geographical ideology, a geographical-racial or racist unconscious," contributions from scholars of Black studies that work against these histories can be translated to the context of postcolonial South Asia in which concepts of race, property, and sovereignty also operate, while attending to their myriad differences.[44]

This concept of translation extends to what I call *feminism in translation*, which I use to think through discontinuities in feminism across the world. If feminist theory is not always applied to persons who identify as women, but also includes questions of labor and reproduction, similarly queer theory is not always about subjects who identify as queer; both feminist and queer studies offer us methods that are useful in analysis. For example, in some revision feminist histories of the South Asian women's movement, scholars mistakenly read a necessarily disorganized resistance and a multiplicity of narratives as lack or absence. To understand these minor, abstract artists, we cannot use feminist

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[43] Sakai, "The Modern Regime of Translation and the Emergence of the Nation," 105.

[44] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 31.

methods that demand a politics of visibility to think through and read movements or work that refuse a politics of representation, identification, and visibility. Instead, we can use queer concepts such as belatedness, disidentification, and refusal. The women's movement that emerged across South Asia in the 1980s, which I am concerned with here, arises out of a different history than that of first and second wave Euro-American feminism, and is part of Third World gay and feminist liberation movements, anti-colonial struggle, and struggles against patriarchy, religious hegemony and secular liberalism. Many feminist artists across South Asia who were part of these movements reclaimed the female figure against patriarchal, nationalist, and religious representations of women's bodies (fig.5).[45] Although Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh did not make work that responded directly to the political articulations of the women's movement nor in the representational forms that were dominant in feminist art of the time, through feminist and queer methods, I argue that all three destabilize gender binaries, exceeding what was expected of them as women. These artists refuse hegemonic representational modes of gendered binaries that predominated at the time, and reclaim abstraction as a minoritarian aesthetic that expresses an ambivalence to a politics of representation that reduces difference to visualizable and essentialized

[45] For more on practices of women artists in Pakistan, see Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* (Islamabad: ActionAid Pakistan, 2002).

identities.[46] Instead of emphasizing what is seen with only one of the senses, which largely preoccupies the disciplines of art history and visual culture and corresponds with political frameworks of representation and visibility, I investigate abstraction through the artists' preoccupation with abstraction and non-ocularcentric concepts such as hapticality, and affect.[47]

Abstraction here describes artworks that do not fall neatly within the binary of pure abstraction versus figuration. Works such as Lala Rukh's seascapes or her hieroglyphics series reclaim modes of representation predominantly associated with men, such as landscape painting or calligraphy in Pakistan at the time, and draws miniature painting and calligraphy together with postwar techniques such as Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, and Conceptual Art.[48] I append *fugitive* to abstraction to describe a form that emerges out of a series of investments in affect, repetition, hapticality, materiality and a daily practice, as an enactment of the performance of making and breaking the law—which is to say the codification of

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[46] The question of vision and a critique of ocularcentrism, which is so central to Euro-American art history, also animates my work. As Juhani Pallasmaa writes, "vision separates us from the world whereas the other senses unite us with it." Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons., Inc., 2005), 10.

[47] Affect in Urdu-Hindi may also be understood as mahol (atmosphere), which I borrow from the writer and translator Naiyer Masud. Farrukhi, "A Conversation with Naiyer Masud," 272.

[48] For writing on calligraphic modernism across the global south that drew from the Arabic, Urdu, and Persian script in the postwar and post-independence period, see: Iftikhar Dadi, "Rethinking Calligraphic Modernism," in *Discrepant Abstraction,* ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006): 94-115; Iftikhar Dadi, "Anwar Jalal Shemza: Calligraphic Abstraction," *Perspectives* 1 (London: Green Cardamom, 2009); Salah M. Hassan, *Ibrahim El-Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012); Anneka Lenssen, Sarah Rogers, Nada Shabout, ed., *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

FIGURE 5. NASREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (CA. EARLY 1970S)

what is even deemed as practice and resistance, not solely in reference to the law but through what Fred Moten calls a "jurisgenerative process" in improvisational practices.[49] This fugitive abstraction is exemplified by obscured vision and vibration in Mohamedi's numinous photographs and drawings, a palimpsestic pulse and sensuous line work in Lala Rukh's seascapes and drawings, and the articulation of an insurgent ground using haptic and mnemonic aesthetics in Zarina's prints and sculptures. These artists also take up abstraction's privileged

[49] I would like to acknowledge the influence of Fred Moten's work on law breaking and making in relation to musicians' practices of improvisation as a "jurisgenerative process" when he says: "Think of Miles, right or Trane [Coltrane], their improvisational work was not in the first instance against the law in some absolute sense. What they were doing was making law, they were constantly engaged in this jurisgenerative process and at the same time they were also constantly engaged in the overturning and undermining of the very jurisgenerative process that they had just made the night before. So there is this intense irreducible relationship between law making and law breaking, between legality and criminality—they are not opposed to one another in some simple ass way." Arthur Jafa, *Dreams are Colder than Death,* 2014, single-channel video (color, sound; 52:57 minutes). Thanks to Constantina Zavitsanos for sharing this reference.

relation to and representational capacity towards opacity, or dimness that attempts to strip away the ethno-racialized specificity of figural representations of the body that predominated in both modernist and feminist movements across the region.[50] This resistance to legibility and investment in feminist formalism, an invagination that resists binaries of inside and outside, or abstraction and figuration, invokes what Derrida describes as "endlessly swapping outside for inside and thereby producing a structure *en abyme*," a narrative that folds upon itself, that destabilizes identity and genre alike.[51]

Although the work of these artists is sometimes situated within Minimalism, I prefer the term abstraction in order to locate it within exhibition histories and histories of abstraction, as abstraction was a fraught concept debated by artists, critics, curators and historians of postcolonial modernism across Pakistan and India, as well as the United States and Western Europe. Minimalism was a term coined by Richard Wollheim in the United States to describe a movement of post-

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[50] Opacity is drawn from the work of Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* and dimness from Naiyer Masud's use of it in an interview with the critic, poet and translator Asif Farrukhi, as well as a confirmation of his love of the word mab'hum by his son, Timsal Mahmud. See: Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010); Timsal Mahmud, email correspondence with author, December 11, 2015-January 13, 2021; Farrukhi, "A Conversation with Naiyer Masud," 270.

[51] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell, in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 55. I came across this reference of Derrida by way of Fred Moten's writing on Frederik Douglass, in a chapter of *In the Break* entitled "Resistance of the Object." He writes: "In his critical deployment of such music and speech, Douglass discovers a hermeneutic that is simultaneously broken and expanded by an operation akin to what Jacques Derrida refers to as 'invagination…. This cut and augmented hermeneutic circle is structured by a double movement." Moten, *In the Break*, 6. He later writes of invagination alongside words such as rupture, collision, augmentation, expansion, renewal, and as "material degradations—fissures or invaginations of a foreclosed universality, a heroic but bounded eroticism—[that] are black performance." Moten, *In the Break,* 14, 26, 40.

industrial American art that began in New York City in the 1960s, of artists who were overwhelmingly white and male, working in the medium of installation art and adapted industrial techniques for their large scale works—Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, Richard Serra, and Donald Judd, amongst others.[52] These artists were interested in industrial or machinic seriality and their work was anti-mimetic, rejected anthropomorphism, refused sitelessness, and was bereft of affect.[53] Exceptions to this Minimalist movement were Agnes Martin—a friend and contemporary of the Minimalists—who made gridded works of square canvases with inscribed lines from the mid-1960s and 1970s, and the artists who were part of Lucy Lippard's exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction*, including Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Don Potts, and Bruce Nauman. Lippard wrote:

> Where the formalist painting tends to focus on specific formal problems, eccentric abstraction is more allied to the conformal tradition devoted to opening up new areas of materials, shape, color, and sensuous experience…. The generalizations made here and below do not, of course, apply to all of the work discussed. Its range and variety is one of the most interesting characteristic of eccentric abstraction.[54]

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[52] Richard Wollheim, "Minimal Art," *Arts Magazine* (January 1965), reprinted in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 399.

[53] Some of Agnes Martin's (1912-2004) paintings in muted colors, which were created by inscribing a sequences of lines atop wet paint, are said to be inspired by Zen Buddhism, which was emphasized in the Guggenheim Museum retrospective of her work. See: Tracey Bashkoff, "Agnes Martin," Guggenheim Museum, New York City, October 7, 2016-January 11, 2017, https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/agnes-martin.

[54] Lucy Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," 99.

Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh's small scale works resemble the preoccupations of the artists in the show, have affective and sensuous force, and were not strictly anti-mimetic, nor did they refuse site specificity. They were invested in aleatory practices of materiality and hand-made seriality. These three artists worked primarily on or with paper, at a small scale, without the mediation of industrial fabrication of prototypes of their work, and in studios that were domestic, live-work spaces, not the scale of post-industrial studios that encouraged the production of large, industrial scale, monumental works.

Hal Foster argues that minimalism involved a reorientation of the relationship between the artwork, its "sovereign" space of display, and the viewer's relationship to the art object. "In this transformation the viewer, refused the safe, sovereign space of formal art, is cast back on the here and now, and rather than scan the surface of a work for a topographical mapping of the properties of its medium," Foster continues, "he or she is prompted to explore the *perceptual* consequences of a particular intervention in a given site."[55] Yet as Michelle Kuo notes, there was a disturbing disjuncture in minimalist practices, a "lag between thinking and making" with regard to the artist's relationship to industrial manufacturing and the fabrication of synthetic materials. For Minimalists, Kuo observes, making becomes "a field of action in which services, media, technologies,

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[55] Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996): 38.

and relation are never merely given or ready-made but are fair game for intervention."[56] The links between industrialization, American imperialism ,and the ecological issues related to extractive economies related to the industries and manufacturing processes used by many Minimalist artists, is also in contrast to the serial, hand-made, small-scale production of Zarina, Mohamedi and Lala Rukh. To underscore not just the industrial technologies but the ideological difference between choosing to work with particular materials, Zarina, for example, replaced the French mill-made printmaking paper she had been working with in Paris with handmade paper from the Gandhi Ashram when she returned to Delhi, after she connected the European import of paper to India with its deleterious impact on local industries and traditions of paper-making; the imported paper was sold at lower prices than India's own paper products, which was part of a colonial project of economic expansion and resulted in social transformation.[57] While Minimalist American artists were working in a postwar, postindustrial society, Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh were witnesses to uneven processes and geographies of industrialization in their postcolonial contexts. They did not do work "in the interval between product design and serial object, the gap between prototype and

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[56] Michelle Kuo, "Industrial Revolution: The History of Fabrication," *Artforum,* October 2007.

[57] Sadia Shirazi, "Feminism for me was about equal pay for equal work—not about burning bras: Interview with Zarina," *MoMA post,* March 8, 2018, https://post.moma.org/feminism-for-me-was-about-equal-pay-for-equal-work-not-about-burning-bras-interview-with-zarina/.

mass manufacture;"[58] they worked instead within a context of multiple temporalities and across the spatio-temporal gap between pre-colonial aesthetics and postcolonial modernism. Furthermore, seriality in these artist's practices was a critical intervention into colonial hierarchies of art and craft, with a suspicion of capitalist industrialization due to its entanglement with new and old forms of imperialism The hand-made seriality of the work of these artists was unlike the industrial seriality of Minimalism; it was entangled with practices of everyday life, and what I read as investments in repetition and invisibilized, reproductive labor as feminist praxis.[59]

Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh placed an emphasis on riyaaz—daily, improvisational practice with an elastic temporality. Qawwal Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan noted that his riyaaz could last an hour or even ten hours, while playback singer Lata Mangeshkar mourned her inability to practice riyaaz more due to the pressures she faced to record music in studio environments.[60] Riyaaz is a term that Lala Rukh used to refer to her daily drawing practice, and one that all three artists

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[58] Michelle Kuo, "Industrial Revolution: The History of Fabrication," n.p.

[59] Although the book did not influence the artist's practices, as it was published in 1980, this idea of "everyday life" is often cited through the French artist and writer Michel de Certeau and the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre. See: Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 3rd ed., trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Vol.1*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1991).

[60] Adam Nayyar, "Interview with Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan," *Ragavani Journal*, 2007, republished at https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/1988-interview/282000.

were very familiar with.[61] I draw this emphasis on practice or riyaaz, and its connection to embodiment, sensation, and affect to inflect a theorization of fugitive abstraction arising out of my analysis of these artists' works and practices in relation to their status as multiply situated minoritarian subjects, or minor artists, which I believe indelibly marks their aversion to figural representation. I draw riyaaz from music into a conversation around visual art through artistic process, to both critique the emphasis on a finished product and challenge the ways in which value is inordinately placed on finished work. Although this valorization of the individuated work, its separation from process and repetition, is more aptly described by the artwork's circulation in an economy and circuit of the art market, including exhibition histories, art criticism, and private and public collections, this production of value is especially fraught for these artists, who faced challenges in having their work understood, exhibited, or even appreciated at the time of its production, which has also inflected the posthumous exhibitions of and writing about their work. Moten observes:

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[61] A student and colleague of Lala Rukh's at NCA, Mariah Lookman, as well as her student, Ayesha Jatoi, also referred to Lala Rukh's drawing practice as her riyaaz, as did Lala Rukh herself. Roobina Karode mentions that Mohamedi's elder sister, Rukaya, compared her "rituals of ablution" before beginning her drawing practice to ibadat, a word for worship in Islam. I prefer the emphasis on practice over worship, for its connotations of following one's desire as a process that produces reality. Ayesha Jatoi in conversation with the author, Lahore, Pakistan, 20 January 2018; Mariah Lookman in conversation with the author, Lahore, Pakistan March 12, 2018. See: Mariah Lookman and Ayesha Jatoi, "Lala Rukh: Panel Discussion," Tate Modern, Online, October 2, 2020, 13:50-14:30; Mariah Lookman, "Interview with Lala Rukh," Asia Art Archives, January 6, 2016, https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/library/interview-with-lala-rukh-2016-transcript. See also: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

> Thus improvisation is never manifest as a kind of pure presence—it is not the multiplicity of present moments just as it is not governed by an ecstatic temporal frame wherein the present is subsumed by past and future. Improvisation must be understood, then, as a matter of sight and as a matter of time, the time of a look ahead whether that looking is the shape of a progressivist line or rounded, turned. The time, shape, and space of improvisation is constructed by and figured as a set of determinations *in and as light,* by and through the illuminative event. And there is no event, just as there is no action, without music.[62]

These artists' fugitive abstraction is a form of riyaaz that resists figurative representation and its relationship to concepts of identitarianism at a moment in which subjectivity and in/visibility were radically reenvisioned through anti-colonial visual and literary representation, as well as the reorganization of the territorial boundaries of Pakistan and India through multiple partitions. I read these changes in representation and in/visibility to reveal structures of race and racialization, and affective belonging. Although partition is seen retrospectively as a schism at the site of religious identity, between India and Pakistan, the subsequent independence of Bangladesh in 1971 troubles this over-simplified narrative and again reveals the occlusion of questions of race and gender and sexuality in subaltern studies. To address these blind spots, I draw tools from the Black radical and Black feminist traditions and the concept of fugitivity towards

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[62] Moten, *In the Break,* 64.

thinking through histories of abstraction and decolonization across South Asia and its diaspora. Riyaaz then describes an improvisational practice of making that exceeds representation and reconfigures the way in which a viewer is looking at and reading artwork; it troubles the frame of tradition and conjures multiply rooted aesthetics from which the artists draw, reverse, and reimagine.

The artists transform the precolonial forms they engage—Mughal, Buddhist, Hindu and Indian Ocean architectures, Nastaliq calligraphy, miniature painting—into a recursive temporality that does not have a beginning nor end and does not think of time linearly, through a stable past, present or future, but invaginates time in as much as space.[63] Furthermore, they re-engage forms that have been fragmented by colonial archaeology and imperial theft, in which miniature portfolios were disaggregated and so are found as pages scattered across the world, while architecture was disassembled and its various pieces dismembered into fragments that are also found in multiple collections of museums—a figure here, a frieze there, a fountain and a column elsewhere. This fragmentation and theft have left an imaginal vacuum for artists who no longer have access to works of cultural value within their countries of origin and can only access them within the diaspora. That is the case for the three artists in this dissertation, and lends credence to the argument that these women attended to this break and rupture through the

[63] Derrida, "The Law of Genre."

reparative and restitutive forms of their work. Fugitivity here also applies to these objects that are held within "dead" archives in colonial collections, basements, and climate controlled spaces. In resistance to this carceral logic of objects in Western museums that are held as property and kept to accrue value is the liveness of riyaaz that evades capture in a stable form.

Fugitive thus describes an escape from social logics in the context of ongoing resistance against majoritarian, patriarchal nationalism and neoimperialism across Pakistan, India, the Indian Ocean, and the United States.[64] I *translate* the concept of fugitivity, drawing from the Black radical tradition and Black studies, in order to argue that these artists offer us an example of migratory, minoritarian aesthetics that precede and presciently predict both Euro-American globalization discourses in the 1990s and the concurrent rise of far-right nationalism and communal violence across South Asia, and exceed hegemonic representations of what constitutes stable identity beyond the nation-state, gender binaries, and juridical frameworks of property as belonging. The dissertation is thus situated within a

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[64] For scholarship on fugitivity from the Black radical tradition and Black Studies, see: Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism,* trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: NYU Press, 2000); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1966); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony,* trans. A. M. Berrett et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 177-218; Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Autonomedia, 2013); Saidiya Hartman and Stephen Best, "Fugitive Justice," *Representations* 92, no.1 (Fall 2005): 1-15; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*; C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Jessica A. Krug, *Fugitive Modernities: Kisama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Moten, *In the Break*; Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

longer trajectory of scholarship on modernism, decolonization, postcoloniality, race and ethnicity, and gender and sexuality.

RACE & IN/VISIBILITY: PROBLEMS IN POSTCOLONIAL & BLACK STUDIES

Postcolonial studies deeply informs this project, particularly critiques of 19th century historiography that it ties to the project of Western European colonialism and domination, which shaped criticism and scholarship in cultural studies, art history, and aesthetics.[65] The Subaltern Studies Group, which included Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, and Gyanendra Pandey, amongst others, have challenged colonial historicist narratives that situate the emergence of modernism and capitalism within Western Europe and its operative concepts of unity, teleology, and linear time through formulations of colonial modernity and multiple temporalities that include the concept of cyclical time, discontinuity, disjuncture, and rupture that are pertinent for my work.[66] While the subaltern school of postcolonial theory is most often

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[65] Art critics and art historians have drawn from these concepts alongside contributions from critical theory, see: Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism in Indian Art?*; Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, *Contemporary Art in Baroda* (New Delhi: Tulika Book, 1997); K.G. Subramanyan, *The Living Tradition: Perspectives on Modern Indian Art* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1987); Arindam Dutta, *The Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of its Global Reproducibility* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*; Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations*.

[66] Scholars in subaltern and postcolonial studies as well as British cultural studies have challenged British colonial historicism's teleological narratives of modernity and capitalism, emerging first in Western Europe before spreading across the world and explored the concept of multiple temporalities, diaspora, third spaces, and modernism's others. See: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); Stuart Hall, "Museums of Modern Art and the End of History," in *Annotations 6: Modernity and Difference*, ed. Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj (London: INIVA, 2001).

referenced in the work of scholars of South Asia or Indian Ocean Studies, I draw from a genealogy of postcolonial studies that includes Black Studies, particularly its work on race, gender, and diaspora. I link the projects of subaltern studies and postcolonial theory with Black studies in order to understand the rise of communalism and the problems of race that are often discussed through the language of ethnicity or communalism in South Asia, which describes minoritarian subjectivity at the multiple intersections of ethnicity, language, religion, sect, caste, and gender.[67] A blindspot of the subaltern studies school and their interest in hegemony was the omission of race and racialization from their theorizations; as upper caste, mostly Bengali Brahmins, they emphasized Hinduism as unmarked difference and privileged the region of Bengal.[68] Ramachandra Guha calls the later work of the group, particularly the emphasis on analyzing elite discourse, "Bhadralok Studies," and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak critiqued their refusal to think through gender as a lens of analysis.[69] I turn to scholarship in Black studies therefore for tools to think through questions of property,

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[67] The British artist of Pakistani origin Rasheed Araeen also draws together questions of Black art and modernism in the context of a postcolonial diaspora in Britain through the Black political movement of the 70s and 80s, which influenced his multi-modal artistic output, including performances such as *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)* (1977); creating publications, including founding the publication *Black Phoenix: Journal of Contemporary Art and Culture in the Third World* and the journal *Third Text*; as well as his curatorial work, such as *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain* at the Hayward Gallery in 1989. See also: Rasheed Araeen, "Our Bauhaus others' Mudhouse," *Third Text* 3, no. 6: Magiciens de la Terre (1989): 3-14.

[68] Shahid Amin, a Professor of History at Delhi University, is one such exception—an Indian Muslim who remained in India, unlike his colleagues Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ranajit Guha, and others.

[69] Ramachandra Guha, "Subaltern and Bhadralok Studies," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 33 (August1995): 2056-2058. Bhadralok is a word in Bengali that describes an elite social class who emerged during British colonial rule in Bengal.

dispossession, criminality, and racialization, as the individuals in this dissertation were minoritarian subjects many times over, and part of communities against whom the force of the law was leveraged, as religious and ethno-racialized minorities and women.

Zarina, for example, was part of Third World women's movements in the US in which she identified as "a feminist committed to the rights of the Third World" and as an Indian from New Delhi.[70] In India, as Muslims came under scrutiny and persecution, both Mohamedi and Zarina's backgrounds as Muslim—though from different regions and sects—came into focus in India and the United States, respectively, as part of a process that Stuart Hall calls "identification."[71] Lala Rukh's relationship to minoritarian subjecthood falls along the lines of her identification as a feminist and an active participant in the Women's Movement. All three artists contested the binary of gender, as well as expectations of how to live and how to make work that were placed upon them as women-identified artists. The artists' status, as minoritarian citizens whose activities are subject to a scrutiny that overdetermines and criminalizes, are central to this project.

My approach is also informed by the work of Black, postcolonial, feminist, and queer studies scholars. Salah M. Hassan notes the significant divergences and

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[70] Lula Mae Blocton et. al., ed., "Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other," special issue of *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* 2, no. 4 (1979).

[71] British cultural studies allows us to think through questions of race, representation, and power through diasporas in the work of Stuart Hall, Rasheed Araeen, and the artwork of the Black Audio Film Collective, amongst other artists, writers, and cultural producers. See: Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies,* ed. Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, and Kenneth Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996): 184-227.

intersections of Black and postcolonial studies. Hassan observes that "they overlap in significant ways as the result of the immense contributions of African and African Diaspora theorists and intellectuals to the rise and evolution of postcolonial studies."[72] Hortense Spillers' theorization of flesh and hapticality is central to this project, as is the work of other Black feminists including Saidiya Hartman, Alexander Weheliye, and Christina Sharpe.[73] Queer theory and queer of color critique are also central to this project due to the emphasis on affect in the work of José Esteban Muñoz, Eve Sedgwick, Gayatri Gopinath, and others.[74] Affect here follows its usage in both critical theory and Marxist-inflected Black feminist and queer theory to think through affect as *social force*, and not only its particular emotional states. I also

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[72] Salah M. Hassan, "Post Colonial Studies and the Black Radical Imagination," ARTH 6514 Syllabus, Fall 2015.

[73] Hortense Spillers distinguishes between the concept of "body" and "flesh" as one of the central distinctions between captive and liberated subject-positions in her foundational Black feminist text "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." She writes: "In that sense, before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography. Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies—some of them female—out of West African communities in concert with the African 'middleman,' we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the *flesh,* as the person of African females and African males registered the wounding. If we think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard." Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 67. See also: Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe 26* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1-14; Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[74] Sedgwick observes: "This consensus view does not exclude emotions, but…it views emotion primarily as a vehicle or manifestation of an underlying libidinal drive. Excitement, rage, even indifference are seen as more or less equivalent transformations of 'desire.' The nature or quality of the affect itself, seemingly, is not of much more consequence than the color of the airplane used to speed a person to a destination." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 18. See also: Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University, Press, 2011).

draw from extensive interdisciplinary work that deploys translation theory.[75] This dissertation draws concepts of fugitivity, refusal, racialization, hapticality, and ungendering from Black studies, feminist, and queer studies together with multiple temporalities, dispossession, bordering, and translation from subaltern and translation studies; these are all grouped together under the larger body of interdisciplinary scholarship called postcolonial studies.

Drawing from this scholarship in postcolonial, Black, and diaspora studies, art historians and scholars of visual culture writing in English, from the 1990s onwards, have challenged canonical Euro-American narratives, offering instead myriad transnational, cosmopolitan, diasporic, and minoritarian histories of modernism across the world. These include studies of abstraction that fill art history's aporia with regard to non-western and non-white artists. Histories of decolonization across the world offer us many other epistemologies and forms of abstraction beyond the Euro-American—calligraphic modernism, hurufiyya/lettrism, Baghdadiat, concretos and neo-concretos movements—found in the work of Black, Indigenous, Latin American, and diasporic artists, as well as an understanding the discursive differences between anti-colonial,

[75] For scholarship deploying concepts from translation studies, see: Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*; Gayatri Spivak, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality, and Value," in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

decolonial, and decolonization as processes and methods that are not identical.[76] One important text is Kobena Mercer's *Discrepant Abstraction,* whose title borrows partially from Nathaniel Mackey's definition of "discrepant engagement" in his cross-regional and cross-cultural study of Black writers from the United States and the Caribbean, and the Black Mountain poets, where *discrepant* described "an expression coined in reference to practices that, in the interest of opening presumably closed orders of identity and signification, accent fissure, fracture, incongruity."[77] Mercer shares Mackey's refusal of the politics of "inclusion" and instead theorizes inter-cultural influence as a mutual borrowing of "polyvocal alternatives" integral to 20th-century art as a whole against a model of one-sided "unilateral appropriation."[78] Mercer defines his discrepant abstraction as "hybrid and partial, elusive and repetitive, obstinate and strange," which includes "almost everything that does not neatly fit into the institutional narrative of

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[76] For writing on calligraphic modernism across the global south that drew from the Arabic, Urdu, and Persian script in the postwar and post-independence period, see: Iftikhar Dadi, "Rethinking Calligraphic Modernism," in *Discrepant Abstraction,* 94-115; Iftikhar Dadi, *Anwar Jalal Shemza: Calligraphic Abstraction* (London: Green Cardamom, 2009); Hassan, *Ibrahim El-Salahi*; Anneka Lenssen, Sarah Rogers, Nada Shabout, ed., *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). On artists who were part of the concretos and neo-concretos movements, see: Cornelia Butler and Luis Pérez Oramas, ed., *Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948-1988*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014); Alexander Alberro, *Abstract in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-Twentieth Century Latin American Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017); Iria Candela, *Lygia Pape: A Multitude of Forms* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017); Maria Amalia Garcia and Matilda Olof-Ors, ed., *Concrete Matters*, exhibition catalogue (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2018).

[77] Mackey as quoted in Mercer, *Discrepant Abstraction*, 10. Mackey analyzes the work of so-called Black Mountain poets including Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, and Charles Olson along with African American poets Amiri Baraka and Clarence Major and Caribbean writers Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris. See: Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[78] Mercer, *Discrepant Abstraction*, 8.

abstract art as a monolithic quest for artistic purity."[79] While this study shares many of Mercer's preoccupations, it thinks of abstraction beyond a "distinctively 20th-century phenomenon."[80]

Scholarship that situates abstraction within a global framework that includes non-western and marginalized artists in the United States and Western Europe include Mercer's work on Aubrey Williams and Frank Bowling's Black Atlantic Abstraction; Joan Kee's work on the Tansaekhwa movement of monochromatic painting in South Korea; Salah Hassan's work on "calligraphic abstraction" and Sudanese modernism in the work of Ibrahim El Salahi; Iftikhar Dadi's comparative perspective on "calligraphic modernism" across North Africa, the Middle East, West and South Asia, including Anwar Jalal Shemza's geometric forms; Anneka Lenssen's work on Syrian modernism; Julia Bryan-Wilson's transnational work on feminist art and textile politics; and the compendium of translated writings by twentieth-century Arab intellectuals and artists

[79] Ibid., 7. Mercer utilizes the concept of "multiple modernities" and explores "interconnected relationships [that] are reexamined from a post-colonial point of view" of "artists from non-western and minority backgrounds" who have been excluded from canonical narratives.

[80] Ibid.

in the co-edited *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents*.[81] It is amongst this recent scholarship of non-western histories of modernism, histories of marginalized artists in postwar movements in the United States and Western Europe, and feminist art and decolonization, that this project makes its intervention. It departs from such scholarship with its inordinate focus on male artists by centering the work of three women. It takes up Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's proposition that we use gender as a lens of analysis, which Joan Scott also describes as using gender as an analytic category, to write a history of abstraction attentive to gender and modernism, and furthermore, to think with Afsaneh Najmabadi, the gender *of* modernism.[82]

Iftikhar Dadi notes that most histories of modernism across South Asia are "inscribed within the horizon of the national and do not acknowledge the full force of transnationalism until after the advent of globalization in the 1990s."[83] Dadi's

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[81] See: Okwui Enwezor, Katy Siegel, Ulrich Wilmes, ed., *Postwar: Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965* (New York: Prestel, 2016); Joan Kee, *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Kobena Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms: Cross-Cultural Perspectives in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Mercer, *Discrepant Abstraction*; Iftikhar Dadi, "Rethinking Calligraphic Modernism," in *Discrepant Abstraction,* 94-115; Aamir Mufti, "Zarina Hashmi and the Arts of Dispossession," in *Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora,* ed. Saloni Mathur (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, 2011): 174-195; Okwui Enwezor, "Place-Making or in the 'Wrong Place': Contemporary Art and the Postcolonial Condition," in *Diaspora, Memory, Place: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z,* ed. Salah M. Hassan and Cheryl Finley (London: Prestel, 2008); Hassan, *Ibrahim El-Salahi*; Lenssen, Rogers, Shabout, ed., *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents*.

[82] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988): 271-313; Joan Wallach Scott, "Women's History," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing,* 2nd ed., ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001): 43-70; Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

[83] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia,* 3-4.

transnational work does not take the nation-state as its framework and foregrounds South Asian Muslim subjectivity, which is largely excluded from studies of South Asian modernism with its predominant focus on India. He observes that "Muslim" in the context of South Asia cannot be essentialized, and "includes fragments from Persianite humanism, Hindu and Buddhist mythology, the orientalist construction of the discipline of Islamic art, colonial governmentality, nineteenth-century theological and modernist reform, modern pan-Islamism, twentieth-century metropolitan and transnational artistic modernism, mid-twentieth-century nationalism and developmentalism, and contemporary debates on race, gender and globalization."[84] This dissertation extends beyond the framework of the nation-state and modernism, taking up the question of transregional and transcultural studies. It also develops and explores the understudied question of gender and sexuality in histories of modernism across South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

PARTITION AND ABSTRACTION

Partition is a fundamental part of this dissertation. Rather than privilege the end of World War II as a key marker in modernism, I focus on decolonization and the multiple partitions within South Asia that rendered Muslims a minority

[84] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 2.

population in one nation, and a majority in two others.[85] The 1947 partition of British colonial India into India and Pakistan forms a backdrop to the aesthetic forms of post-independence modernist artists, while the liberation war of 1971 and the independence of Bangladesh pose another historical disjuncture. I contend that the artworks and artistic practices in this dissertation emerged out of the particular conditions of resistance to British colonialism and the trauma of partition occurring concurrent with decolonization. The story of abstraction across South Asia is a fragmentary and minoritarian one, and includes Zubeida Agha, Mohammed Kibria, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Jagdish Swaminathan, Shakir Ali, and others.

Modernism and debates around abstraction and gender in South Asia can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century and the foundation of art institutions across British colonial India. Around two decades after the development of colonial curricula in British art institutions, the philosopher Rabindranath Tagore used funds awarded to him when he received the Nobel Prize in Literature to found the Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan, often referred to colloquially as Santiniketan, as an alternative to British colonial art education. The school was founded in 1901 and drew heavily from curriculum that was developed earlier at the Government

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[85] Hannah Feldman's important work on France and French people's relationship to French Algerian or Algerian diasporic subjects living in France also take up this argument regarding the simultaneity of the postwar era with the era of decolonization and ongoing war in the case of the Algerian war of independence. My scholarship differentiates itself from Feldman's in that it does not take Europe and its hegemonic subject as its focus but interrogates and attempts to write a history of minoritarian subjects as counter-hegemonic. See: Hannah Feldman, *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

School of Art in Calcutta by the Principal Ernest Binfield Havell, an English administrator who worked jointly with artist Abanindranath Tagore, a nephew of Rabindranath Tagore who was appointed Vice President of the School from 1896 to 1906.[86] Santiniketan exemplified the search for anti-colonial aesthetic epistemologies to express a modernist vision of Indian nationalism.

Santiniketan developed an artistic pedagogy that combined curricula on art and aesthetics in addition to rural redevelopment, with an emphasis on everyday life.[87] The campus in Santiniketan was where artistic pedagogy occurred, while in nearby Srinitekan students learned hands-on through the cultivation of rural land and by training in vernacular crafts such as loom weaving and pottery.[88] These principles of self-reliance, or swadeshi, which were a part of the independence movement, were drawn from the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi with his emphasis on economic independence from the British through a revival of vernacular economies such as paper making and khadi. Tagore and Gandhi shared an idealization of village life, and though they wrote about gender roles, I contend that problems of gender, patriarchy, and reproductive labor within the anti-colonial movement were reproduced in visual representation, as I will demonstrate further.

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[86] Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, 270.

[87] Ernest Binfield Havell and Abanindranath Tagore developed a pedagogy for the school based on "Indian" as opposed to "Western" models of art and art education, which are considered progenitors of the school Rabindranath Tagore founded in 1919. Bittner and Rhomberg, *Bauhaus in Calcutta*, 12; Partha Mitter, *Indian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[88] Bittner and Rhomberg, *Bauhaus in Calcutta*, 4.

Exhibitions were important sites of discursive production on abstraction and masculinity, even if gender was not articulated as such. The 1922 exhibition of Bauhaus and Santiniketan artists organized at the Indian Society of Oriental art in Calcutta (ISOA) reveals interesting intersections and divergences of Weimar Bauhaus artists and anti-colonial Santiniketan modernists. The work of early Bauhaus teachers such as Johannes Itten were exhibited along with Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, Wassily Kandinsky, and from the Santiniketan school, Nandalal Bose, Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore, and Sunayani Devi and Shanta Devi, who were women. At this time, Bauhaus artists were heavily influenced by theosophy, and its spiritual bent was evident in the works displayed, which were further underscored by Austrian art historian Stella Kramrisch's catalogue text. Kramrisch emphasizes abstraction in both Kandinsky and Itten's works and also describes them with words such as "spiritual" and "mysticism." About Itten, she writes, "his work has religion."[89] Kramrisch noted the shared anti-naturalism of both art movements, seen in the abstraction of the Bauhaus artists and the Santineketan artists who refused British naturalism.[90]

The two movements shared not only an aversion to naturalism, but also a belief in the transformative potential of art upon the individual and society, though

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[89]Stella Kramrisch, "Exhibition of Continental Paintings and Graphic Arts," reproduced in Bittner and Rhomberg, *Bauhaus in Calcutta,* 4.

[90] Ibid.

the aesthetic forms they chose to express these were completely distinct. The Weimar Bauhaus's critical stance to industrial modernity reflected that of other avant-garde artists in Western Europe who were critical of industrialization's alienating effects upon society, such as its valorization of machine production over artisanal handwork and its emphasis on rationality over spirituality. In the context of Santiniketan, this antagonism was a form of resistance to British colonialism, its emphasis on naturalism in art academicism and colonial hierarchies of fine arts and crafts—part of a larger institutional project that Arindam Dutta describes as an imperial bureaucracy that cultivated "taste"—which the Santiniketan artists responded to by reintegrating crafts with fine arts.[91] Although a Bauhaus-inspired curriculum was created in Pakistan by the American educator and artist Mark Writter Sponenburgh—one of the founders of the National College of the Arts (NCA) in 1958, formerly the Mayo School of Arts—in India it was the influence of Santiniketan that cast a long shadow on its modernist artists. In India, artists, critics, and historians articulated an anxiety around abstraction as a "Western" form after the 1947 partition.

Debates around abstraction were reformulated between the 1950s and the 1970s. While abstraction was not promoted by critics or institutions in the newly independent nations of Pakistan or India, this was the same time that the United

[91] Dutta, *The Bureaucracy of Beauty*.

States was using Abstract Expressionism as a tool of soft power during the Cold War, as well as the state promotion of Tansaekhwa in South Korea, Japan, and France.[92] Modernism in India in the 1970s was defined against what was perceived as Western abstraction or "International Art." In the journal *Vrishchik*, co-editor Gulam Mohammed Sheikh observed that the "Modern Indian artist is facing the greater dilemma of his life: to be Indian or to be international."[93] The flightiness of "so called International art" was often used interchangeably with "Western art" and "abstraction" and juxtaposed with phrases such as "national consciousness," "Indian," and "indigenism" that had more weight and implied that Indian artists drew from local influences.[94] When artists are described as moving "towards abstraction" it means that they are moving away from figural representation. Furthermore, although K.G. Subramanyam recognizes abstraction in both Tantric and Islamic aesthetics,[95] and Geeta Kapur mentions Tantra in her Marxist-inflected writing on abstraction and equates abstraction with Greenbergian formalism, with its emphasis on color, composition, and texture, both read abstraction as bereft of socio-political content.[96] She writes: "Similarly, these other abdications of social

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[92] Kee, *Contemporary Korean Art*.

[93] Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, *Vrishchik* 5 (March 10, 1970): 1.

[94] Geeta Kapur, "In Quest of Identity: Art & Indigenism in Post-colonial Culture with Special Reference to Contemporary Indian Painting," *Vrishchik* 2, no. 10-11 (Aug-Sept. 1971): n.p.

[95] K.G. Subramanyan, "Religion and Art," *Vrishchik* 3, no. 4-5 (Feb-March 1971-1972): n.p..

[96] See John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

responsibility in Indian painting, which go by the name of Abstract and Tantric Art…I am not against these forms of art *per se*…. To my mind, Abstract art was the logical corner into which the fragmentation caused by industrialization and the resultant separation of form and content drove the artist."[97] Kapur does note the abstract influence in the work of artists such as Mohan Samant (1924-2004), V.S. Gaitonde (1924-2001), Ram Kumar (1924-2018), Satish Gujral, (1925-2020) and Krishen Khanna (1925-), though she attributes it to the influence of "French abstraction" and Paul Klee's work, and not to American Abstract Expressionism.[98] Geeta Kapur was highly influential in identifying the national-modern style of avant-garde Indian artists in her writing about the Bombay Progressive Artist Group (PAG), including the influential essay "When was Modernism in Indian Art?" Later, through the exhibition *Place for People* (Delhi and Bombay, 1981), in which Kapur identified as a collaborator and not a curator of the six artists from Group 1890, she also contributed to our understanding of the transition from Indian modernism to postmodern artistic practices.[99] Partition is rarely mentioned in Kapur's writing, although a few issues of *Vrishchik* are devoted to the second

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[97] Geeta Kapur, "In Quest of Identity: Art & Indigenism in post-colonial culture with special reference to contemporary Indian painting: Contemporary Indian Painting," *Vrishchik,* Eds. Gulam Sheikh and Bhupen Khakhar, April-May, 1972, Year 3, Nos. 8-9: n.p.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Kapur explained that *Place for People* "was a self-generated project of six artists and a critic. We did not anyway use the term curator at that stage and I functioned very simply as a member of a group or collective. This was therefore *not my* exhibition." Natasha Ginwala, "Geeta Kapur: On the Curatorial in India (Part 2)," *Afterall,* October 3, 2011, https://www.afterall.org/article/geeta-kapur-on-the-curatorial-in-india-part2. See also: Kapur, *When Was Modernism in Indian Art?*.

partition of West and East Pakistan in 1971, and the violence perpetrated by West Pakistan on East Pakistan during Bangladesh's war of liberation. Gulam Mohammed Sheikh does make reference to Satish Gujral as the "only artist to paint agonies of partition," and determines that his work, in its literalism, ends up melodramatic and cliched.[100] Both Kapur and Sheikh note that the generation of artists who came of age through partition did not directly represent the violence of partition, although it is palpable in the diagonal cut that repeats throughout Tyeb Mehta's paintings, and later in Somnath Hore's (1921-2006) *Wounds* series from the 1970s, which he made in response to the 1943 Bengal famine and are akin to Zarina's cast paper pulp sculptures made at the same time in New York.

In Pakistan, by contrast, there was no singular modernist style that emerged post-partition. As Dadi observed, modernism "decenter[ed] the identification with a specific national site," which produced a particularly vexed relationship with the form of the modern nation-state.[101] The figurative realism of the Bengal School and British colonial academicism also inflected the practices of Ustad Allah Baksh (1895-1978) and Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1897-1975), as well as the London-born art educator Anna Molka Ahmed (1917-1994), and the painter Khaled Iqbal (1929-2014), who were very influential on post-independence artists' practices in

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[100] Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, "Tradition and Modernity: Towards a More Relevant Art," *Vrishchik* 4, no. 4 (December 1973). Satish Gujral studied art in Mexico with the Mexican muralists, before returning to India.

[101] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 12, 21.

Lahore. Postcolonial modernists in Pakistan included groups such as the Lahore Arts Circle (LAC), founded in 1952, of which Shakir Ali (1916-1975) and Anwar Jalal Shemza (1928-1985) were members, as well as adherents to the Punjab School of landscape painting such as Iqbal. Ali, an artist and educator, worked primarily in abstraction, as did Zubeida Agha (1922-1997), making her one of very few women modernists in Pakistan. Ali was highly influential as the principal of the National College of the Arts in Lahore, and his student Shemza worked with what Dadi has called transnational "calligraphic abstraction," while another student, Zahoor ul Akhlaq (1941-1999), broke with his mentor and formulated a new, postmodern aesthetic away from the influence of the European avant-garde, drawing heavily from Mughal miniature painting and postwar American art movements such as color field painting and Abstract Expressionism.[102] Diasporic figures such as Krishna Reddy (1925-2018), an artist and educator who studied at Santiniketan and became a close friend and supporter of Zarina in New York, worked with abstraction in his viscosity prints made during his time at Atelier 17. The sculptor Novera Ahmed (1939-2015) worked in then East Pakistan and West Pakistan, collaborating with Hamidur Rahman (1928-1988) on the Shaheed Minar monument commemorating the martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement, which was later destroyed in the 1971 war and rebuilt in 1983. Ahmed left for Paris in

[102] Dadi, "Anwar Jalal Shemza."

1970, the year before Bangladesh gained independence. Rasheed Araeen, who was born in Karachi, studied engineering and migrated to London in 1964, where he became part of the Black arts movement, was both a performance artist and abstractionist.

By working with forms of abstraction and a feminist praxis, Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh broke rank with modernist movements in the 1960s and 1970s across South Asia, which were almost exclusively the domain of men, and with feminist art practices. These artists' male peers worked predominantly with chromophilic painting in oil and acrylic at a large scale, taking up historical themes in forms such as narrative realism or expressionist figural painting. In contrast, the small scale, process-based, serial works of these artists, which were primarily black-and-white works on paper, were considered feminized in terms of their media and excessively formal, derided for their apparent lack of political engagement. I argue this perceived lack was due to their opacity, the difficulty of reading the work as aligned with a recognizable political project.

Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh's lives unfolded against a backdrop of intense and rapid change following decolonization across South Asia. The artists came of age in Aligarh, Bombay, and Lahore, cities in the newly independent nations of India and Pakistan during a time that Vazira Zamindar calls the "long partition," due to partition's protracted temporality beyond a singular event, and

its ongoing effects on people across South Asia.[103] This included increasing tensions across the border, the rise of ethno-racialized communalism and majoritarian nationalism in each country, through to the mobilization of the transnational women's movement. Partition, which occurred in 1947, resulted in independence from British rule and the creation of West Pakistan, East Pakistan, and India. It was followed by the Bengali Language Movement protests in 1952, the 1965 Indo-Pak war, and East Pakistan's 1971 War of Liberation from Pakistan, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. In Pakistan, the death of Governor-General Mohammad Ali Jinnah in 1948, just over a year after the country's independence, created a climate of political instability and early military rule, beginning in 1958 under General Iskander Mirza and lasting for decades—in 1958 with General Ayub Khan and again in 1977 with General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq. Dadi observes that although "Islamization" is attributed to Zia, it in fact began under the "Islamic socialism" of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1973, although the regimes before and after him were greater allies of the United States during the late Cold War.[104]

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[103] Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[104] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia,* 173-174. See also: Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press Doubleday, 2004).

Lala Rukh was a student at Punjab University in 1968 when student mobilizations joined cross-class protests against Khan's dictatorial rule. She returned to Pakistan from Chicago where she had just completed a Master in Fine Arts only weeks before Zia claimed power in a coup. While she was a committed movement activist, Lala Rukh's work bore little relation to the feminist art practices of other women of her generation, which deployed symbols such as the chaadar or veil, included representations of the woman's body, or made references to crafts, such as sewing, associated with women's work. Lala did not "challenge the male gaze," as did her contemporaries, nor did her artwork contain explicitly political content, despite her germinal role as a co-founder of the Lahore chapter of the grassroots Women's Action Forum (WAF).[105] As a result she was rarely written about or exhibited as part of women's shows.[106] In contrast to Lala Rukh's exclusion of the female figure, Salima Hashmi observed:

> As a symbol of fecundity, the female body was a prime site for provocation, an abode of sin and forbidden sensations. For women artists, the female body, its containment, concealment, and visibility became a matter for meaningful

[105] Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*.

[106] The only writing I am aware of on Lala Rukh during that time was by the art critic Akbar Naqvi. Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 197-198.

exploration…. For the Pakistani woman artist, the uncovering of the female body became a rallying call to the barricades.[107]

Across the border, after Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure as Prime Minister, India experienced its first martial law during the state of emergency instituted by democratically-elected Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975, which also corresponded with the emergence of the women's movement and the United Nations' "year of the woman" that coincided with a series of governmental reports on the status of women in India and Pakistan. By this time Zarina had left Delhi—where she had been part of the burgeoning community of artists who were living and working in and around Nizamuddin basti, and where she made a number of significant works with found materials—and migrated to New York. By 1975, Mohamedi had been teaching Fine Art at Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda for two years, having shifted from Delhi, and prior to that from Bombay. Liberalization in India began in the 1990s, where this dissertation ends.

GENDER AND POSTCOLONIAL MODERNISM

In both anti-colonial and postcolonial modernist paintings across South Asia, the female figure was ubiquitous. The feminized figure often represented "tradition" or the body of the nation, where "woman" symbolized material and

[107] Yashodhara Dalmia and Salima Hashmi, *Memory, Metaphor, Mutations: The Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*.

social reproduction, such as in Abanindranath Tagore's *Bharat Mata* (Mother India, fig. 6) from 1905, which conflated the woman's body with both tradition and the territorial boundaries of the nation state. Although this youthful figure was represented alone, not yet a mother or wife, she still worked in the service of religion as an ascetic, a repository of traditional religious values, a site of resistance to the transformations of society wrought by British colonialism.

This watercolor painting depicts a young woman, a sadhvi (ascetic), dressed in a saffron sari. She glows from within, a halo of light behind her covered head, and lotus flowers strewn near her feet that stand firmly planted upon the ground. There is a harmonious expression upon her face, which is turned away from the viewer, represented in three quarter view. Her four arms echo visual representations of Hindu deities, while the lotus flowers at her feet suggest that life begins with water, reinforcing the idea that life also begins with woman, womb, earth. The figure cites a vernacular imaginary of exclusively Hindu and upper-caste deities: in her four hands she holds sheaths of paper, a rudraksha mala (rosary) sheaves of a rice paddy, and a white cloth.[108] Although this is considered the first such representation conflating the idea of an Indian nation with the body of an upper-caste Hindu woman, the idea of Mother India as a goddess is traced to a play of the same name by Kiran Chandra Banerjee, published in 1882; the chant of

[108] This sadhvi does not appear seated or standing upon the lotus, like some representations of Vishnu, Ganga, Ganesha, or Lakshmi, but stands near the flowers.

FIGURE 6. ABANINDRANATH TAGORE, *BHARAT MATA* (1905)

"Vande Mataram" ("Mother, I bow to thee"), which was first an anti-colonial, nationalist chant sung by Rabindranath Tagore in 1896 and has now been appropriated by the far-right Hindu nationalist movement, originates in a novel by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay from 1882. This new representation that uses the female body to map the territorial boundaries of the nation-state included D. Bannerjee's popular propagandist print *Bharat Mata in Shackles* (1930s), a depiction of Mother India with two of her hands bound, a trishul (trident) flag held in another hand, rice sheaves in another, her feet atop the southern tip of the subcontinent in Tamil Nadu, and behind her head a crown of light emitted by the northern tip of Kashmir, as the portraits of four political figures float above her in the sky.[109]

These visual tropes of Mother India proliferated across British colonial India. This symbol even inspired the construction of a temple with a carved marble relief map of undivided India. The Bharat Mata Mandir located in Varanasi was built in 1936 and inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi. This temple allowed visitors to worship the nation as land, and although it does not include the image of the Hindu woman, it nonetheless evokes it spectrally.[110] Its architectural style and

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[109] These include Lala Lajpat Rai, Lokmanya Tilak, Motilal Nehru, and Chittaranjan Das. See Aishwariya, "Comparative Analysis of Bharat Mata by M. F. Hussain, D. Bannerjee and Abanindranath Tagore," *Arts and Aesthetics* (blog), March 22, 2017, http://anahataaesthetics.blogspot.com/2017/03/comparative-analysis-of-bharat-mata-by.html.

[110] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

name underscore its unconscious assimilation of tropes that conflate being Indian with Hinduism and the nation with the body of the Hindu woman. The image painted by Tagore was a refined representation of Mother India that arose out of the anti-colonial, modernist aesthetics epitomized by the Bengal School, its overwhelming references to a concept of Indian indigeneity and language that evoked Hinduism. Other visual representations followed, featuring maternal icons laid atop cartographical representations of the subcontinent, meant to inspire the viewer to action. These include a cover of a 1909 Tamil magazine *Vijaya* representing a fearless mother ready and willing to sacrifice her progeny, who were nestled in her arms, atop the map of undivided India. This other revolutionary Bharat Mata, who embodied the land, was often accompanied by weapons or shown mounted on a vahana (mount), drawing from Hindu iconography of deities astride non-human animal vehicles. Tagore's painting, with the woman's calm and saturnine face, her bare feet firmly planted upon the ground, and symbolic objects held in her hands, appealed instead to a refined aesthetic sensibility that privileged the acquisition of knowledge and revered the earth underneath her feet, hoping to inspire a thoughtful and contemplative mood, as well as an investment in Hinduism.[111] In noting the emergence of these corporeal representations against the colonial technology of cartography, Sumathi Ramaswamy argues that Indians

[111] Ibid.

engaged in "barefoot cartography" to create "a more earthbound and sensory, even corpothetic, relation to the soil, land, and territory than is arguably possible when following the protocols of a lofty and rarefied science such as cartography."[112] Although subsequent scholarship has shown that the British relied on Indian colonial subjects to map and create surveys of the subcontinent, she clarifies her use of "barefoot" as an analytic is a metaphor of her understanding of the relationship of "barefoot-ness."[113] Manu Goswami observes, "*Bharat Mata* marks the historically significant reconstitution of colonial spatiality into national property."[114]

The 1930s etching by Abdur Rahman Chugtai *Mughal Artist* (fig. 7) also draws from the distinctly Indo-Persian modern aesthetic of the Bengal School. Dadi observes that the artist references seventeenth-century Mughal miniatures in his etching:

> The Mughal Artist is placed among a landscape of rocks, flowering plants, and trees whose sparse linear and rhythmic composition recurs in the shape of the Artist's turban

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[112] Sumathi Ramaswamy, "Maps, Mother/Goddess, and Martyrdom in Modern India," in *Empires of Vision: A Reader,* ed. Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 447. See also: Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation*. C.A. Bayly observes that colonial exercises of mapping were antithetical to the "romance and imagination" that denote Indian cultural myths in his work. See: C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). See also: James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[113] See note 33 in Ramaswamy, "Maps, Mother/Goddess, and Martyrdom in Modern India," 447.

[114] Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 203.

FIGURE 7. ABDUR RAHMAN CHUGHTAI, *MUGHAL ARTIST* (1930S)

> and the decorative motif of the Artist's outer garments. He looms as a separate figure in the foreground, yet also remains an integral part of the landscape, as the linearity of his scarf and the botanical motifs on his tunic echo the surrounding foliage and rocks…. The very act of striving to secure this ground over the chasm of the centuries of decline of Mughal painting, while acknowledging the impossibility of its recovery by deploying a style that is consistently and unmistakably that of Chughtai, paradoxically marks him as the first significant South Asian Muslim artist in the modern era.[115]

In this etching, the artist depicts a Mughal nobleman and artist in profile from the waist up, who holds onto a miniature painting with a thick marbled border, loosely folded in half; the figure of a woman is visible, her midriff exposed, wearing what appears to be a lehenga. She gazes directly at the viewer, while the Mughal artist averts his gaze, his languorous eyelids conjuring his beloved in his mind. The linework of the image is exquisite. Chughtai deftly renders the semi-sheer materiality of the turban atop the artist's head as well as of the shawl thrown over his shoulders, underneath which the pattern of flowers on his angarkha are visible.[116] The background of the image is rendered with more positive space and less dense linework than the subject in the foreground. The landscape resembles that of early modern Chinese painting and Indo-Persian miniature, with its oblique rock formations and tender flowering plants directly behind the artist. Like early

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[115] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia,* 5-8.

[116] An angarkha is a style of top worn by men across South Asia that dates to the pre-colonial era. A lehenga is a skirt worn by women across South Asia.

modern, Persian representations of amrads, young men who were the objects of desire of older men, this beautiful young artist has no visible beard marking "the adolescent male's transition from an object of desire to a desiring subject."[117] Najmabadi explains that "male love and desire, intimately linked with notions of beauty in the Persianite medieval discourse, could be generated at least as easily by a beautiful male face as by a female one. Premodern Islamic literature considered gender irrelevant to love and beauty."[118] He does not even have a light mustache, which would have indicated "a movement into manhood." Lest the viewer's gaze confuse the male artist as the beautiful object of our gaze, his hands are shown clasping the figure of the woman in the painting he holds, as if at her waist and indicates that it is she who draws his sensuous eyelids downward. This image differs from Persianite representations by exhibiting, in the angularity of his jaw and bridge of his nose, a new form of modern masculinity and beauty.[119] I argue that the woman's body functions to situate this image outside the symbolic realm of medieval Persian representations while it draws from it, indicating the emergence of the modern male subject as one operating with heteroerotic desire. Unlike Tagore's didactic and asexual image of Mother India, this is a sensual one, its didacticism lying in what Dadi describes as the transformation of the "artisan"

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[117] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards*, 15

[118] Ibid., 17.

[119] I adapt this reading from Najmabadi's analysis of early modern Persian poetry and paintings. Ibid., 15-16.

into an "artist" through the image and, I would argue, a transformation of gender in that the image, rendering it as a distinctly heteroerotic, modern, male subject, differentiated from its precolonial representations in which men, too, were represented as objects of desire.

Over one hundred years after Tagore's *Bharat Mata*, M.F. Husain—known as the "barefoot artist" due to his habit of walking around without shoes—painted his red-hued *Bharat Mata* (2004), in which he attempted his own hand at a corpothetic, feminine representation of the homeland.[120] In this painting, the now familiar representation of Mother India takes the form of a nude woman whose legs are bent and tucked behind her, her arms extended holding the eastern and western portions of the map of undivided India, the names of regions inscribed upon her body—atop her left breast, on her stomach, across her thighs. The figure seems bound and tortured, an embattled site upon whose body lay many claims. A white wheel with sixteen spokes rests on her right arm. Her body is contorted, her gaze emitted in jagged lines that extend to a rising sun over a horizon that she twists her head to see. On her left, the sea contains the figure of a dhow, moving westward, with sails rendered in black, red, and ochre; to her right is the profile of a person, painted black, who sits atop the water with their legs crossed as if meditating, gazing at her. As a result of this work and another nude of the goddess Saraswati,

[120] Husain maintains that the painting was not named by him. "MF Husain obituary," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jun/15/mf-husain-obituary.

which was seized by Hindutva activists for obscenity, M.F. Husain was forced into exile due to criminal charges against him and threats on his life. Although much has been written about that incident and his subsequent exile in Qatar, where he was offered and took up citizenship, what is interesting here is that the crime that the painter committed was what had changed in the interim between the trial against Akbar Padamsee for obscenity in Bombay in the 1950s, a case that was won by the artist's lawyer through his citation of the precedent of nudity in pre-colonial representations at Hindu temples, and Husain's challenges in the 1990s.[121] Kapur tethers the exile of the modernist "artist-(as)-citizen" M.F. Husain to the erosion of secularism in the postcolonial Indian state. She situates his vulnerability to "the rightwing and the largely conservative middle class by a designed strategy of the Hindutva ideologues."[122] Kapur observes:

> The antagonists then cast the issue as between Hindu/Indian iconography and Muslim iconoclasm, and the illegitimate license acquired by Husain to negotiate these…. The attacks on Husain since 1996 are directly linked with the rightwing ascendancy of the urban middle class, but they feed on the Husain legend, his

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[121] See "Judgment in the Trial of Akbar Padamsee for alleged obscene paintings," reprinted in *Marg: A Magazine of the Arts* 69, no. 3 (Mar-Jun 2018): 24.

[122] Geeta Kapur, "Lecture: The Exile of M.F. Husain" (SAHMAT, New Delhi, August 24, 2009): n.p. Asia Art Archives Collection. See also: Sadanand Menon, "M.F. Husain: When the Nation Loses Its Own Narrative," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 25 (June 18-24, 2001): 13-15.

> public 'investiture,' and his star status, producing rampant resentment almost equally as religious outrage.[123]

Husain's transgression in depicting Hindu iconography seems tied to his minoritarian status, the fact that he was not Hindu and particularly that he was Muslim. The dissertation ends with a consideration of the artist Rummana Hussain, whose identity as a Muslim woman was overdetermined by the writing on her work as her practice shifted radically from painting to performance after her experience of living through the anti-Muslim Bombay pogrom in 1992, in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid.[124] Both she and Husain were in Bombay at the time and traumatized by the coordinated, large-scale attacks across all classes and neighborhoods of the city, which rendered them strangers in a city they belonged to. Both artists participated in anti-communal exhibitions as part of the SAHMAT Collective in the wake of the attacks, although Husain soon left for the

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[123] Kapur, "Lecture: The Exile of M.F. Husain."

[124] The reverberations of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, in 1992, were felt across the borders in Pakistan and Bangladesh and by diasporic populations across the world. The Babri Masjid was a sixteenth-century mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), that was destroyed in December 1992 by Hindu kar sevaks, activists who attended a rally organized by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindutva party closely linked to the Hindu nationalist organizations Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). The destruction of the masjid occurred in the wake of the BJP leader L. K. Advani's "Ram Rath Yatra," a march that agitated for the erection of a Ram temple on the contested site of the birthplace of Ram, at the site of the mosque. The destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya ignited street protests and communal tension throughout India and destabilized neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh with retaliation riots. The event marks the formal beginning of the continuous rise of right-wing Hindutva and anti-Muslim violence—the Bombay riots in 1992, the massacre in Gujarat in 2002, among others—all culminating in the election of far-right BJP leader Narendra Modi in 2014. See note in Sadia Shirazi, "Feminism for Me Was About Equal Pay for Equal Work—Not About Burning Bras: Interview with Zarina," *MoMA post,* March 8, 2018, https://post.moma.org/feminism-for-me-was-about-equal-pay-for-equal-work-not-about-burning-bras-interview-with-zarina/.

United Arab Emirates due to the nature of the threats he faced, while Hussain remained in Bombay, traveling to Europe and the United States for residencies and cancer treatment, making an exceptionally strong body of work in the seven years before her death at the age of forty-seven. Although Hussain's performance practice is markedly different from that of Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh, I will explore the ways in which her work draws from concepts of the feminine, domesticity and materiality redolent in their work, while making a particular claim that challenges the opposition of Hindu iconography and Muslim iconoclasm, oppressed and liberated subject positions, and religious and secular subjects.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This dissertation consists of three monographic chapters and an epilogue. The first chapter focuses on Zarina, whose work and career bridged the modernist movement of post-independence New Delhi and the Post-Minimalist feminist movement of New York in the 1970s. I begin in New York, tracing the schisms between second-wave feminism, or what Howardena Pindell called "imperial feminism,"and the Third World Women's movement of which she was part. Moving backwards in time, I locate her experiments with paper in what I call her "soft sculptures," the found objects she restituted and collaged in relief prints made in New Delhi in the 1970s. Drawing from theories of hapticality in Black studies and gender and sexuality studies, I argue

that she marshals an insurgent ground and haptic vision against the colonial technology of the aerial view. Although Zarina's work is often situated as mourning the loss of an originary home and language, I argue that it is an anoriginary home that the artist centers in her work, foregrounding experiences of fugitive migration and displacement. This is underscored by the importance of translation in her work, the inclusion of both English and Urdu, in which I read the use of Urdu Nastaliq calligraphy as both visual and textual, against Aamir Mufti's reading of it as text. I take up notions of anti-coloniality, translation, and nationalism in the work of Aimé Césaire and Naoki Sakai to articulate that it is not Urdu that the artist is preoccupied but with language anterior to ethnicity, prior to the ethno-racialization of Muslims and their conflation with the Urdu language in India.

The second chapter focuses on Nasreen Mohamedi and revises the historical record by demonstrating that Mohamedi did in fact exhibit her photographs during her lifetime, correcting the inaccuracy that underlies all writing on the artist and every contemporary exhibition of her work. In one of two solo shows she had at The British Council in Manama, Bahrain, Mohamedi exhibited a series of abstract photographs alongside her paintings. Beginning with a work in this exhibition, I contend that many of Mohamedi's photographs, produced using experimental darkroom techniques, are documents of witness to the rapid transformation of architecture and the built environment in India and across the Indian Ocean through the 1960s. I contend that the

artist's reliance on chance and experimentation in the darkroom offers us a delicate counterpoint to the technologies of extractive capitalist economies of mining and oil that transformed the landscapes she photographed. Unlike Indian documentary photographers who captured the transformations that independence and modernization wrought on people's lives, I argue that Mohamedi's numinous photographs stand in for the human body, portals to a space and time beyond modernism and modernization that render these images through a particular "feminine" sensibility.

The third chapter focuses on Lala Rukh and what I argue is her works' ungendering of the ontology of the gaze by reworking the traditionally masculine genres of Islamic calligraphy and landscape painting in Pakistan.[125] Beginning with her figure drawings, I analyze her transformation of the verticality of the calligraphic line of the Alif, the first letter of the Urdu alphabet, into a canted or reclining line, what I call her "layta hua khat." Focusing on her figure drawings from the 1970s, I argue that she re-engenders the gaze by rendering men with nisa'iyat (femininity), a practice with precedent in early modern visual culture from the Qajar dynasty. Building upon my analysis of her line work, I study three serial works that integrate calligraphy, Urdu poetry, miniature painting techniques, and experimental darkroom photography, and

[125] Orientalist landscape painting during the Victorian era was popular amongst women. See: Deborah Cherry, "Earth into World, Land into Landscape: The 'Worlding' of Algeria in Nineteenth-Century British Feminism," in *Orientalism's Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography,* ed. Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

contend that her artwork stages what Fred Moten refers to as a "fugitive movement in and out of the frame, bar, or whatever externally imposed social logic."[126] Lala Rukh's work differs from feminist figural representations of the era in that it does not reclaim the female figure; instead, it centers the problem of the "feminine" as both an object of representation and a desiring subject in postcolonial modernist aesthetics across South Asia. I contend that the artist stages a disruption to the gendered ontology of the phallocentric, patriarchal gaze as well as the reversal of that gaze in feminist practices of that era through a reclamation of gendered ambiguities of the ashiq and mashooq (lover and beloved) in early modern poetry. I expand Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of liberal feminist discourse and the problematic of the subaltern subject who speaks for themselves to think through how Lala Rukh suspends voice as a site of political representation through non-utterance in her work.

In the epilogue, I conclude by tracing the ways in which these artists locate belonging beyond the geographic and nationalist imaginal borders and ideological boundaries of the post-independence subcontinent for the postcolonial, feminine subject, only to return to a crisis of the nation-state through an analysis of the work of Rummana Hussain (1952-1999). The artist's performances depart from the static, spare, black and white, two-dimensional works on paper of Zarina, Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh, yet Hussain extends the feminist praxis they inaugurate by using material objects

[126] Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 178.

from everyday life to signify a minoritarian body through references to the the city, architecture, and disability. The organized, anti-Muslim pogrom in Bombay that Hussain lived through marked a turning point in her life, catalyzing a shift in her practice from painting to performance, which I analyze by looking at two works, *Living on the Margins* (1995) and *Is it what you think?* (1998). This dissertation ends with the period of liberalization in India that was commensurate with attacks against minorities, including the pogrom against Sikhs in 1984, the Tsundur massacre of Dalits in 1991, and the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, to name only a few incidents of violence that are not unique to this era of liberalization. I focus on the question of the minority Muslim subject through Hussain's work and the reverberation of the destruction of the Babri Masjid, which set a series of anti-Muslim attacks into motion, and counter-attacks in the neighboring countries of Bangladesh and Pakistan that were also felt across the diaspora. If the Muslim subject constitutes the Indian nation's outside, an excess, her practice evokes the spectral anti-colonial representation evoked by Tagore's *Bharat Mata*, although Hussain disrupts the signification of mother and Indian woman extending it through her own figuration as the Indian Muslim woman, while untethering Islam from its associations with an Islamicate legacy that is associated with "Arab" civilizations. Hussain re-engenders Islam through her performances and her use of everyday objects, which I read as her work's troubling of

the oppositions between Islam and indigeneity and secular and religious subject positions.

Chapter 1. Zarina: On Feminism in Translation and Hapticality

My generation, we never identified ourselves by religion.

—Zarina[127]

Zarina was just ten years old when partition occurred.[128] Her mother took her daughters and fled the violence engulfing the north of what was then British colonial India by traveling by road from Aligarh up to Delhi, where they stayed in a refugee camp, and then down to Karachi, where they could live with extended family.[129] The artist recalled that her father had no desire to leave India and the family was reunited in Karachi, after which her father led his children through his native Punjab and to his ancestral village before they returned home to Aligarh through the then porous

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[127] Ranu Samantrai, "Cosmopolitan Cartographies: Art in a Divided World," *Meridians* 4 no. 2 (2004): 188.

[128] While partition is recognized as a cataclysmic event, I focus on the afterlife of partition as a structure and the ways in which its trauma structures everyday life across the subcontinent and its diasporas. I draw the term "afterlife of partition" from Saidiya Hartman's theorization of the "afterlife of slavery" in her book *Lose Your Mother* alongside the idea of translation as the afterlife of a text, as theorized by Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida. The afterlife of slavery is characterized by Hartman as the endurance of slavery's racialized violence in the present day "undertreatment" of Black people in the United States: "This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment." Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 6. Benjamin and Derrida refer to translation as the "afterlife" of a text. See: Jacques Derrida, "Living On/Border Lines," trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (London: Continuum, 2004), 62-142.

[129] Zarina's mother and sisters stayed with her elder sister who was married and living with her husband and children in Karachi. Zarina in conversation with the author, New York, August 2016.

boundaries, after the killing and looting had subsided.[130] Both the visual and olfactory memory of rotting bodies strewn along the roadside that Zarina passed as a child remained with the artist throughout her life, although she spoke of it very rarely, if at all.

Although Aligarh, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, was the city of her birth, Zarina's parents had migrated there from the Punjab Province. The artist's father, Sheikh Abdur Rasheed, was a Professor of History at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and the family lived on campus in faculty housing. Zarina's mother was in purdah, which means that she was educated by teachers within the home and that she did not work outside of it. The tradition of purdah shifted after partition, and Zarina was educated outside of the home in Urdu medium schools. Zarina grew up in a multilingual context; while her father was fluent in English and Persian, her parents shared the languages of Urdu and Punjabi and raised their children speaking Urdu exclusively at home, as they were wary of corrupting their accents with Punjabi intonations. Her family slowly trickled out of Aligarh, eventually migrating to West Pakistan by the late 1950s.[131] This

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[130] Zarina's mother fled their home with her daughters first. Her husband and son stayed behind, intending to join later. See: Zarina and Sarah Burney, *Directions to My House* (New York: Asian/Pacific/American Institute at NYU, 2018).

[131] Irfan Habib in conversation with the author, Lucknow, November 2017. Zarina's sisters left Aligarh after marrying into families living in then West Pakistan, and her father shifted the family to Lahore when he had to relocate for work in the late 1950s. Habib was a student and close friend of Zarina's father.

left her in the not uncommon predicament of belonging to a homeland with no family left in it, part of the afterlife of partition.[132]

After Zarina completed her undergraduate degree at AMU in mathematics in 1958, she married and left Aligarh. Her husband, Saad Hashmi, was a diplomat in the Indian Foreign Service and the young couple moved often due to his work, living in cities across the world including Bangkok, Bonn, and Paris. Zarina began printmaking in Bangkok, where the couple moved first after marriage. After moving to Paris in the 1960s, she apprenticed with Stanley William Hayter at the experimental printmaking workshop Atelier 17 and found herself alongside many artists from the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia who were studying in Europe on fellowships from the late 1950s through the 70s, including Krishna Reddy, an artist who had studied in Santiniketan, was living in Paris since the 1950s and also ran the Atelier alongside

[132] Partition displaced approximately fifteen million people, along religious lines, and resulted in deaths that range in estimate from one to two million, in addition to the rape of approximately seventy-thousand women. It resulted in the formation of Muslim-majority West and East Pakistan and Hindu-majority India; Pakistan subsequently experienced another partition in 1971 with Bangladesh's War of Independence and the dissolution of its two wings. The mass migration during partition did not include all castes. Dalits, for example, were not allowed to migrate from West Pakistan eastward to India. It bears mentioning that the largest scale of violence occurred across Punjab and Bengal, with more sporadic violence across the rest of the subcontinent. While mass migration occurred in 1947, families continued to move across both countries throughout the 1950s and 1960s, until movement was more restricted and visas became difficult to obtain even for people with families on both sides of the border.

Hayter. Reddy's wife, the artist Judy Blum (1943-), and Zarina remained lifelong friends and the three artists all ended up migrating to New York a decade later.[133]

Zarina and her husband returned to Delhi in 1968, after which Zarina separated from her husband and moved into a barsati, a small, one room apartment in Jangpura, where her hulking printing press doubled as a dinner table.[134] Zarina lived within walking distance of a burgeoning community of artists in south Delhi, including Tyeb Mehta, M.F. Husain, Krishen Khanna, and Jeram Patel, who were still a ragtag group of artists, not yet the celebrated modernists they would become. She created a significant body of work in Delhi with found materials, a series of relief prints of discarded wood. She left for Tokyo in 1974 on a fellowship to apprentice in woodblock printing at the studio of Toshi Yoshido before immigrating the following year to the United States. While Zarina was not part of the women's movement in India, having left before it began, by the time she returned to New Delhi from Paris she had dropped her marital surname in a gesture I read as a critique of patriarchal naming conventions that render women as property—the personal was in fact the political.

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[133] Judy Blum lives and works in New York. She is also known as Judy Blum Reddy. Blum has shown in New York City at P.S. 1/MoMA, Art in General, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, ABC No Rio and at Rutgers University, as well as The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and Galeria Nicolas Deman in Paris and the Fond National d'Art. Her works are in the collection of Fond National d'Art Contemporain (FNAC), Centre National d'Art de Grenoble, the Bronx Museum of the Arts and Cleveland Museum of Art. She has a BA from Cooper Union in New York.

[134] Laila Tayabji in conversation with the author, New Delhi, December 2017. One particularly memorable dish was Zarina's roast duck with oranges.

FIGURE 8. ZARINA, *KISS* (1968)

In New York City, Zarina reconnected with old friends from India and built a new community of friends and artists. Ram Rahman, a photographer and the son of the modernist architect Habib Rahman, whom Zarina knew from Delhi, was also living there and introduced her to the abstract painter Mehlli Gobai (1931-2018), and the two became fast friends. Reddy, whom she had met at Atelier 17, and Blum had also moved to New York from Paris and provided her with support, particularly after her husband, whom she had never divorced, died from a sudden heart attack. Zarina has recounted that this was a difficult period in her life, and one in which she struggled emotionally and financially.

It was in New York City that Zarina became involved in the Third World women's movement and feminist art movements. The Third World women's movement was distinguished from the "first world" white feminist movement of "imperial feminism," which consisted predominantly of white, middle-class women who largely excluded women of color.[135] Zarina supported herself by teaching paper making and paper casting classes at the New York Feminist Art Institute from 1979 through 1985 and taking freelance work in graphic design. Zarina joined the guest editorial collective for the "Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other" special issue of *Heresies* (fig. 9), worked on its graphic design, and curated "The Other Portfolio," which consisted of

[135] Howardena Pindell called second wave feminism "imperial feminism." Kazuko Miyamoto, Howardena Pindell, Judy Blum Reddy, and Sadia Shirazi, "*Soft and Wet* Publication Launch & Conversation" (Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Project Space Gallery, New York City, November 16, 2019).

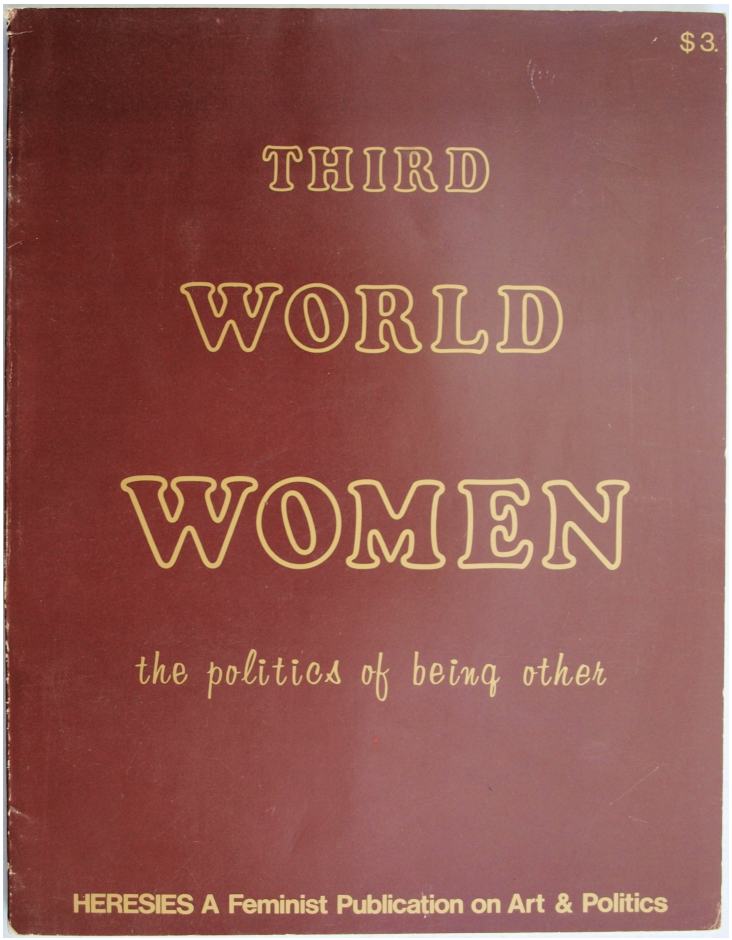

FIGURE 9. LULA MAE BLOCTON, ET. AL., "THIRD WORLD WOMEN: THE POLITICS OF BEING OTHER," SPECIAL ISSUE OF *HERESIES* (1979)

abstract works with paper by artists including Emmi Whitehorse, Virginia Jaramillo, and Lula Mae Blocton.[136] It was at this time that Zarina began drawing from the influences of New York City's burgeoning feminist, post-minimalist work, evident in her experiments with cast paper-pulp sculptures from the late 1970s onwards. The artist drew these explorations alongside her varied interests in the German Renaissance prints

[136] See Blocton et. al., "Third World Women," 1, 66-71. The issue interspersed artworks between essays and poetry, which included writers such as Adrian Piper, Naeemah Shahbazz, and Sandra Maria Esteves, amongst others. The "Third World Women" guest collective also described themselves variously as "painters, poets, educators, multi-media artists, students, shipbuilders, sculptors, playwrights, photographers, socialists, craftswomen, wives, mothers and lesbians" who are "*other* than the majority and the power holding class…[with] concerns *other* than those of white feminists, white artists and men." Zarina was the only "Indian" in the guest editorial group, and one of two Muslims, which I note was as of yet an unremarkable identity for Indian artists.

and postwar Euro-American modernist sculpture she had encountered in Europe, post-independence Indian modernism and paper making traditions, Japanese woodblock prints, Kufic and Nastaliq calligraphy, and Buddhist and Islamic architecture.

Zarina exhibited her work frequently in India and Pakistan throughout the time that she was living and working in New York. She also participated in international workshops and exhibitions, such as the Asilah Printmaking workshop in Morocco in 1988 and the SAHMAT exhibitions against communalism in India, *Gift for India* (1997) and *Making History Our Own* (2007).[137] Throughout this time she exhibited less in the United States, though her work was collected by MoMA in the 1970s. Her work was included in *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists* (1980), which Zarina co-curated with her friends Ana Mendieta and Kazuko Miyamoto at A.I.R. Gallery, the first feminist cooperative gallery in the United States. Mendieta and Miyamoto were at the time the only artists of color in the gallery and friends of the artist, who they had recommended for admission. It was not until *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2003) that Zarina's work was included in a group exhibition in a museum in the United States.[138] The septuagenarian artist then had her first museum retrospective, *Zarina: Paper Like Skin* (2012), curated by Allegra Presenti at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, the year after she represented India in its pavilion at the Venice

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[137] Jessica Moss and Ram Rahman, *The Sahmat Collective: Art and Activism in India since 1989*, exhibition catalogue (Chicago: The Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2013).

[138] Zarina and Nasreen Mohamedi were the only two artists from across South Asia included in the show. See: Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, ed. *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

Biennale in 2011 in a show curated by Ranjit Hoskote. She was refused a visa to travel to India that same year—she had given up her passport in order to take up American citizenship. It is around this time that Zarina came to the attention of larger audiences in the United States, where she had been living and working for over thirty-five years.

In contrast to her belated reception in the United States, Zarina was one of few artists recognized in South and West Asia who was working with forms of abstraction throughout her career and bridged the concurrent postwar and postcolonial temporalities. Zarina exhibited her work internationally across South Asia and engaged with a wide audience beyond Western Europe and the United States, and had a strong transnational network of support from friends and family. Her work has fostered a generation of younger artists who also worked with abstraction and unselfconsciously drew together multiple influences from across various movements and regions, including Mohammad Ali Talpur, Ali Kazim, Seher Shah, and Ayesha Sultana.

ON PRINTMAKING: 1970s DELHI

The May/June 1970 issue of the publication *Vrishchik* (fig. 10) features a conversation between six Indian printmakers in Delhi that includes Zarina, the only woman in the group.[139] *Vrishchik*, which means "scorpion" in Gujarati, was an art

[139] Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, "On Printmaking," *Vrishchik* 7/8 (May/June 1970), https://issuu.com/asiaartarchivehk/docs/gms_vrishchik1970_yr1.7-8.

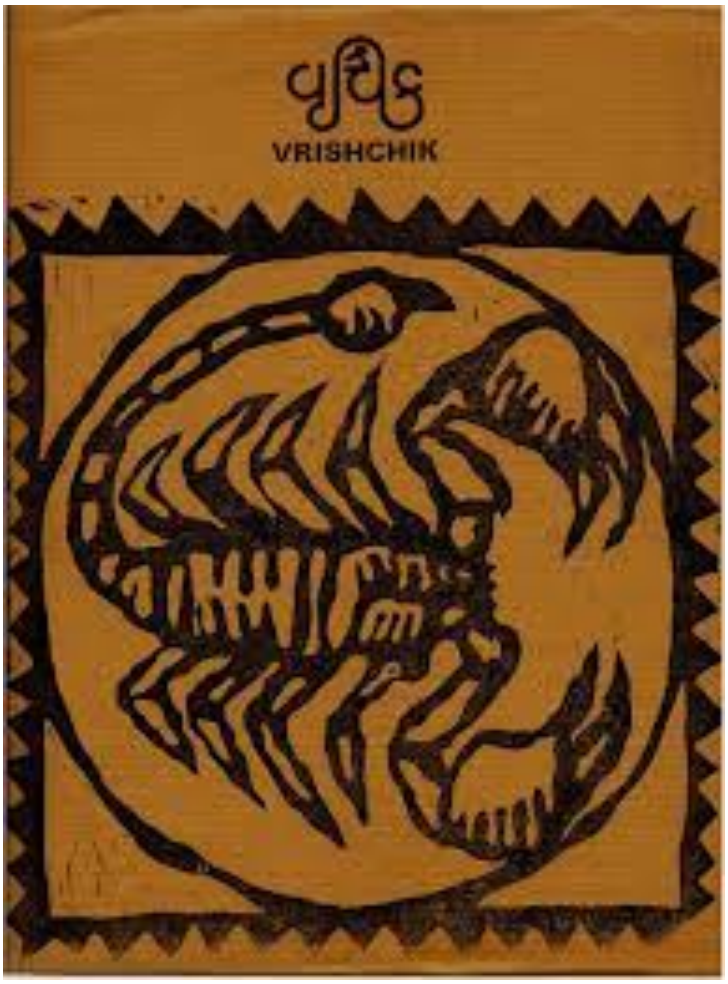

FIGURE 10. *VRISHCHIK* 1, NO. 7/8 (MAY/JUNE 1970)

magazine, though in the Western language it fits more squarely within the term journal. The publication was founded and edited by Gulam Mohammed Sheikh and Bhupen Khakhar (1934-2003), artists who lived in Baroda and taught in the Faculty of Fine Arts at Baroda University. "On Printmaking" was initiated by the editors of the journal, both well-known artists in their own rights, after a Smithsonian printmaking workshop in which they had all participated.[140] The conversation included American artist and printmaker Paul Lingren and Indian artists Jyoti Bhatt, Jeram Patel, Gulam Mohammed

[140] The printmaking workshop took place in Delhi and was a series of such workshops led by the Smithsonian across South Asia. Lalit Kala Akademi Archives, Delhi, India.

Sheikh, Bishambhar Khanna, Jagmohan Chopra and Zarina.[141] The artists debated the relationship between printmaking and painting, the singular art object versus the reproduction, and the disciplinary status of "graphics," as printmaking was known.[142] Accompanying the conversation between the artists are ten pages of prints, mostly lino-cuts; an exception is Zarina's *Cage* (1970), a relief print made from collaged wood.[143]

Cage is part of a series of relief prints that Zarina made in Delhi (1968-74) that are remarkable for their engagement with architecture, materiality, and affect. The titles of her prints range from the iterative *Structure, Structure I*, and *Structure II* (1968) to citations of architecture—*Wall* (1969) and *Door* (1971)—and more affect-laden titles—*A Sigh* (1970), *Kiss* (1968, fig. 8), and *Cage* (1970). These prints play with traditional wood block methods, in which wood is carved to create a negative image that is then inked to make a positive print. Instead of carving wood, Zarina printed directly from pieces of salvaged wood, picking them off the street in Nizamuddin basti, and then cleaning and

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[141] Jagmohan Chopra was a printmaker, painter and photographer and the founder of Group 8 (1969) in Delhi. Bishambhar Khanna is an Indian painter and enamelist. Jeram Patel also taught at University of Baroda and was close friends with Nasreen Mohamedi, whom he introduced to Zarina. Jyoti Bhatt, a photographer, painter and printmaker, taught at the University of Baroda along with Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, a painter and historian who is responsible for building up the Department of Art History in Baroda.

[142] In the last line of the preface, Sheikh mentions that the artists Nasreen Mohamedi and Umesh Verma were also present during the discussion, although neither spoke. Zarina enters the conversation only midway, her contributions pivoting around formal considerations regarding questions of color, variation, and reproduction in printmaking, and an insistence upon thinking of it as a unique visual medium. "Printmaking," Zarina argues, "has to be accepted as a different visual medium, as for instance sculpture. It is a process of digging into the plate." Sheikh, "On Printmaking."

[143] The other exception is Jyoti Bhatt's metal plate etching. Ibid.

oiling them to restore them enough to be printed from.[144] The artist remembered collecting them from Nizamuddin, and felt a kinship to the discarded wood pieces, which prompted her to collect, care for, and print from the wood itself. Wood is not only treated as a medium of transfer by the artist; she was interested in its materiality—its grain, knots, splits, and cracks—and in the materiality of the paper she printed on. Zarina inked the blocks very lightly so the fibrous Indian handmade paper emerges beneath the print, creating a kind of moiré pattern of the horizontal ribbing of the paper against the vertical wood grain.[145] Zarina was uninterested in creating variations of a print, as she expressed in *Vrishchik.* Experimentation was limited to the artist's process prior to the print transfer—her nontraditional methods of printing directly from salvaged wood, determining the placement of the print on the page, choosing the paper; the rest of her process was carefully planned and executed.

In her earlier S*tructure* series, Zarina created discrete assemblages out of irregularly shaped wood planks that read as if they were culled from larger, piecemeal, vernacular constructions. In both her process and the method by which she created her assemblages, she brings forward that which is a remainder: collecting discarded wood,

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[144] Zarina in conversation with the author, 2016. Nizamuddin is a neighborhood in West Delhi in which a number of dargahs (mausoleums) are located, such as that of the Sufi saint Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya (1238–1325 CE) and the tomb of Amir Khusro (1253–1325 CE) his student, which is buried beside him.

[145] This handmade paper was sourced in New Delhi from the Khadi Gram Udyog Bhawan, founded by Gandhi. Allegra Pesenti, *Zarina: Paper Like Skin*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2012), 15.

FIGURE 11. ZARINA, *WALL* (1969)

restituting, then inking for print. Zarina made time visible, showcasing what it has wrought on this found material. *Wall* (fig. 11) is a dark brown print that consists of transverse sections of wood squares cut into various sizes, stacked irregularly, tiled and collaged, their grain varying in orientation as it tessellates across and then beyond the top of the page. In another brown toned print, *Door* (1969), six long planks of brittle wood are placed vertically and interrupted by a thinner horizontal piece of wood that jaggedly connects them. The print registers the carefully arranged, billowing negative

space between the wood pieces along with the thin, dense, vertical grain of the wood itself. As Zarina's experimental process occurred in the stage prior to printing, the final itself does not exhibit process.

In her woodblock prints, the artist renders architecture as affective as opposed to purely tectonic. *Kiss* (fig. 8) references Constantin Brancusi's sculpture *The Kiss,* which Zarina had seen in Paris. Brancusi's softly rounded, cubic carving is of a man and woman, arms encircling one another in an embrace, their lips pressed together. The gender difference in Brancusi's sculpture is simply a differentiation rendered by color in Zarina's work—one plank is printed in black ink, the other in brown. The gesture of physical contact is represented as joinery, a thin cross section of wood that connects the upper third of the two long planks together. The affect-laden *Cage* consists of vertically arranged thin sections of wood that create the form of a rectangular enclosure. The finely textured filaments of the wood grain register on paper as do the gaps between the wood pieces. In these woodblock prints the artist represents architecture by rendering architecture as affective as opposed to purely tectonic.

Zarina and the other artists who took part in the conversation "On Printmaking" were part of a dynamic community of artists who came from all over India to live in Delhi in the 1960s and '70s. Zarina was an anomalous figure in this constellation of artists, not only being the sole woman, but also due to the form and content of her work. She worked exclusively in spare, black and brown, neutral-toned relief prints at a

time when most artists were working with figural representations in printmaking or painting narrative social realism in saturated colors on canvases. Like Zarina, many of these artists had recently returned from living, working, or studying abroad, primarily in France and England.[146] Zarina had just returned to Delhi from Paris: "Delhi was very exciting in the seventies. There were lectures and discussions. I was living in Delhi when Nasreen [Mohamedi] came back from Kuwait or Bahrain and Tyeb Mehta came back from New York…. Tyeb's place was our adda."[147]

The male painters amongst this group came to constitute the avant-garde of the Indian modernist movements of the second half of the twentieth century, through the immensely influential writing of Geeta Kapur.[148] Kapur observes that in the 1960s, "abstract artists of the erstwhile Group 1890 and the so-called neo-tantrics held sway," yet by the late '70s "the more strictly modernist style in Indian art, especially abstraction, was on the wane."[149] Zarina and Mohamedi were both exceptions to this rule, working primarily in black and white, not color, and with paper at a small-scale,

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[146] Support for artists to travel abroad ranged from scholarships from the French government for Indians to study in Paris, Commonwealth fellowships to study in London from the British government, and American Rockefeller Foundation grants that took them to New York.

[147] Shirazi, "Feminism for me was about equal pay for equal work." An adda is a Hindi-Urdu-Bengali-Gujarati word that describes both a place for gathering and a long, informal conversation.

[148] Mathur's excellent book closely examines the writing, criticism and curatorial practice of Geeta Kapur (and the artist Vivan Sundaram), from her dissertation at New York University onwards. Saloni Mathur, *A Fragile Inheritance: Radical Stakes in Contemporary Indian Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 100-129.

[149] Kapur, *When Was Modernism in Indian Art?*, 309;.

not painting on large canvases.[150] Both artists were interested in Mughal architecture and "Islamic" calligraphy—Mohamedi's photographs from the 1960s testify to this, as does Zarina's work.[151] They also engaged with techniques of architectural representation, Mohamedi in her drawings from the 1970s onwards, and Zarina in both her woodblock prints from Delhi and her New York sculptures from the same period.

Kapur argues that modernism in the postcolonial context of India exists in a conjoined "national/modern" relation.[152] Indian modernity was considered by Kapur as

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[150] Geeta Kapur, in a section on "Islamic aesthetics," observes that Mohamedi has "an understanding of geometry and light that the Arab civilization has developed and honed into a magnificent aesthetic." Geeta Kapur, "Again a Difficult Task Begins," in *Nasreen Mohamedi: Waiting Is a Part of Intense Living*, exhibition catalogue (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofia, 2015), 189. A recent issue of *Marg* co-edited by Kapur was dedicated solely to abstraction: Geeta Kapur and Jyotindra Jain, "in focus: Abstraction," *Marg* 68, no. 1 (September-December 2016). Kapur's writing on Mohamedi does not mention architecture as an influence but does cite "Islamic art." Many historians, including Kapur, attribute to Mohamedi and Zarina's art an "Islamic" or "Sufi" influence, which I ascribe to the inability to think of India in relation to the Indian Ocean itineraries of South Asian inhabitants that lie beyond territorial nationalism, which is pertinent for Mohamedi's work. Such writing also exhibits a failure to think of Islam as indigenous to the subcontinent, alongside Hinduism and other faith groups. Shahab Ahmed puts forward the argument that we need to differentiate between Islam as a theoretical object or analytic category and Islam as a human and historical phenomenon when we use the terms "Islam" or "Islamic," and emphasizes the everyday lived reality of Muslim practices that exceed liturgy and text. Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015): 116. See also: Kapur, "Elegy for an Unclaimed Beloved: Nasreen Mohamedi (1937-1990)," in *When Was Modernism in Indian Art?*; Shahid Amin, *Conquest and Community: The Afterlife of Warrior Saint Ghazi Miyan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[151] The historian Avinoam Shalem observed: "When you go to a museum in the West, you are not seeing Islamic art, you are seeing the history of the West collecting Islamic art." Avinoam Shalem, "What is Contemporary Islamic Art?" (CAA Conference, February 17, 2015, New York City). On the use of the term "Islamic art" to connote pre-modern architecture from parts of the world where Islam was practiced, Dadi writes "The term 'Islamic art' is arguably a catachrestic signifier (without adequate referent) even for the premodern era; it covers a geographic area for a period exceeding a millennium and is not primarily seen as religious art, or even as made by or for Muslims, in this respect being quite different from terms such as 'Buddhist art' or 'Christian art,' which are generally reckoned to deal specifically with the art of faith." Dadi, *Modernism and The Art of Muslim South Asia*, 32. Dadi draws the concept of catachresis from Gayatri Spivak who writes: "They're being reclaimed, indeed claimed, as concept metaphors for which no historically adequate referent may be advanced from postcolonial space, yet that does not make the claims less important. A concept metaphor without an adequate referent is a catachresis. These claims for founding catachresis also make postcoloniality a deconstructive case." Spivak, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality, and Value," 225.

[152] Kapur, *When was Modernism in Indian Art?*, 299.

a left-wing, progressivist, avant-garde project that evolved in conjunction with revolutionary, anti-colonial "national" culture, unlike Western modernists who were critical of both academic art and patronage by the state.[153] Fred Moten observes that the impossibility of an avant-garde that is also Black is "all but justified by a vast interdisciplinary text representative not only of a problematically positivist conclusion that the avant-garde has been exclusively Euro-American, but of a deeper, perhaps unconscious, formulation of the avant-garde as necessarily not [B]lack."[154] This is in spite of European colonialism and chattel slavery creating "the condition of possibility of modernity."[155] In Naoki Sakai's work, nationalism is understood as a "specifically modern form of communal belonging" in which "nationality connotes an individual's exclusive belonging to the state," mediated through the nation.[156] Iftikhar Dadi is similarly suspicious of the framework of "national art history" and turns his focus instead on the emergence of modern, Muslim subjectivity through a close reading of artists in the post-colonial context of Pakistan, rendering South Asia beyond its conflation with India.

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[153] Ibid., 298-300. Kapur also notes that discrepant stages of capitalist development in India rendered modernization incomplete, even further complicating questions of modernization and modernism.

[154] Moten, *In The Break*, 32.

[155] Ibid., 31-32.

[156] Naoki Sakai and Sandro Mezzadra, "Introduction to 'Translation,'" *Translation: a transdisciplinary journal,* Issue 4-Politics (Spring 2014): 11. Sakai notes that this "modern form of communal belonging for an individual…was not to be found anywhere in the world before the eighteenth century."

Historians and critics who contributed to scholarship on Indian modernism privileged artist living within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state. Geeta Kapur writes that artists who "embodied the modernist impulse of *choosing* metropolitan 'exile'—the first criterion of modernity, according to Raymond Williams" became "the first heralds of internationalism in India."[157] She did not write about Zarina, though, perhaps because she did not choose exile, but had it forced upon her, as part of partition's afterlife.[158] Although Zarina's father had no intentions of leaving India after independence, due to financial concerns, he migrated for work to Pakistan in the late 1950s while her sisters had all been married to men from families living in Pakistan, resulting in the artist having no remaining family left in the country she called home. She did not inherit property through her father, the childhood home that she returned to in her later work was faculty housing provided by Aligarh Muslim University and, in addition, Zarina did not receive the pension owed to her by the Indian government, because she continued to live in New York City after her husband's death. Still, she continued to return home, whether in the late 1960s when she lived in New Delhi or later in life when she visited friends and showed her work in galleries. Zarina was not engaged in what Kapur describes as "tasks of subjectivity...[that]require acts of allegorical exegesis—often via the nation."[159] Zarina's work refuses national narratives

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[157] Kapur, *When Was Modernism in Indian Art?*, 304-305. Italics added.

[158] Ibid., 298.

[159] Ibid., 298.

FIGURE 12. ZARINA, *WALL* (1979) IN "THIRD WORLD WOMEN." SPECIAL ISSUE OF *HERESIES* (1979)

and modes of representation, by which the Progressive Artists Group, for example, constructed what Kapur describes as a national/modern project. She also refuses representations of monumentality that were the hallmark of Minimalist artists in New York City. Zarina's abstraction is the inverse of high modernism in architecture; it is not replicable in any site, and it is localized, fragile, and invested in the ground against the figure. Her collaged relief prints from the 1970s are made in a style that has no kinship with other printmaking practices in India at the time, when the artist established a novel method of material inquiry and haptic engagement that I argue she continued to work with, recursively, for the rest of her career. It is to the 1970s in New Delhi that we

must trace the origins of the work Zarina builds upon during the next few decades in New York.

Imperial Feminism and Third World Women: 1970s New York

Zarina hosted the first meeting of the guest editorial staff of *Heresies*' special issue "Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other" in her live-work studio in Chelsea.[160] When Zarina joined the guest editorial collective, she was recently widowed, under extreme financial stress, working freelance graphic design jobs, teaching paper making courses at the New York Feminist Art Institute, making sculptures, and taking a course on editing at The New School in preparation for the issue.[161] In its editorial statement, the group articulated their myriad reasons for coming together for the special issue, including "to exchange ideas" and "wanting to work with other Third World Women to break the isolation of racial/sexual tokenism experienced in college, on the job, in the women's movement and in the 'art world.'"[162] The guest collective also communicated feeling invisibilized by *Heresies,* an exclusively "First World" collective of white women for whom gender was the primary signifier of difference.[163] The "Third World Women"

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[160] The editorial collective for this special issue of the feminist publication *Heresies* included Lula Mae Blocton, Yvonne Flowers, Valerie Harris, Zarina Hashmi, Virginia Jaramillo, Dawn Russell, and Naeemah Shabazz. See Blocton et al., ed., "Third World Women," 1.

[161] Zarina in conversation with the author, New York, September 2016.

[162] Blocton et al., ed., "Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other," 1.

[163] Ibid.

staff, by contrast, included artists who identified as "Asian-American, Black, Jamaican, Ecuadorian, Indian (from New Delhi), and Chicana; foreign-born, first-generation, second-generation, and here forever," and whose work differed in form and feminist context from that of the main *Heresies* collective.[164] The statement reflects on their year and a half process and notes tensions within the "Third World" group itself, as well as feeling that the *Heresies* collective were racist and paternalistic towards them.[165] Submissions were even difficult to field: "Some writers, artists and activists would not submit their work, viewing the *Heresies* collective as racist and feeling the collective was using us."[166] The wide-ranging issue, under the capacious category of "Third World Women," includes written contributions by Adrian Piper, Audre Lorde, and Naeemah Shabazz, amongst others, and a variety of artists' works, including Beverly Buchanan's cast concrete sculptures, Jaune Quick–to–See Smith's drawings, Ana Mendieta's *Silueta* series, and Zarina's paper pulp sculptures.[167]

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid. The editorial statement noted "our relationship with the Heresies collective…vacillated from our being vaguely aware of their presence to reactions of anger and suspicion because of unclear or double messages that we felt were racist and paternalistic." The artists whose works were part of this special issue include: Howardena Pindell, Michelle Cliff, Beverly Buchanan, Julianne Malveaux, Emmi Whitehorse, Virginia Jaramillo, Lula Mae Blocton, Ann Page, Zarina, Li-Lan, Ana Mendieta, Maria Lino.

[167] The "Third World Women" guest collective also described themselves variously as "painters, poets, educators, multi-media artists, students, shipbuilders, sculptors, playwrights, photographers, socialists, craftswomen, wives, mothers and lesbians" who are "*other* than the majority and the power holding class…[with] concerns *other* than those of white feminists, white artists and men." Zarina was the only "Indian" in the guest editorial group, and one of two Muslims, an as of yet unremarkable identity. Blocton et al., ed., "Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other," *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, issue 8, vol. 2, no. 4 (1979): 1.

Zarina edited the "Third World Women" issue, worked on its graphic design, and also contributed artwork. She curated the contributions in "The Other Portfolio," an insert of mostly abstract works on paper, including her work *Wall* (fig. 12). The cast-paper pulp sculpture is an extruded grid of densely-packed squares that emerge from a thickened ground, a three-dimensional object that references its two-dimensional origins. The photograph of this work by her friend, the photographer Ram Rahman, fills the page as if it were a two dimensional object; the image does not convey the way the work was installed or encountered in space. In person, the grey cubic sculpture resembles concrete, but upon closer inspection, its air pocket-like holes belie a soft, fibrous materiality. While *Wall* recalls post-war American minimalism, its small scale, organic materiality, and relationship to space are in tension with the large-scale, free-standing metal sculptures by artists such as Richard Serra and Donald Judd in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Zarina's work is anti-monumental, refusing minimalism's scale. It instead remains small, episodic, and poetic.

While Serra professes an interest in the way bodies move through space, the large-scale monumentality of his work results in only one kind of spatial encounter, making people feel diminutive, at times dominated by the work. In addition to Judd's freestanding sculptures, he also made wall pieces that were part of his "Specific Objects," which he described as "neither painting nor sculpture,"[168] although they

[168] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," 1964.

primarily engaged with viewers through vision, a relationship Rosalind Krauss attributed to the persistence of painting's pictorial traditions in his illusionism.[169] Zarina's emphasis was instead on visceral materiality and the imbrication of vision with touch in her work—a haptic vision. The handmade irregularities of her work were deliberate, registering a tension between industrial and handmade repetition and privileging hand-made seriality over the mechanical, a touch that privileges feeling over late-modernist Western visuality that signifies.[170] While Serra and Judd's large-scale metal sculptures both appear and are in fact very heavy, Zarina's sculptures are playful, appearing heavy but in fact very light. In contrast to Judd's reflective, colorful wall pieces, which shifted as a viewer moved around them, Zarina's wall mounted sculptures demanded duration from the viewer; they moved inwards and cast shadows within themselves, not upon the space they were installed in.

Zarina had more in common with Post-Minimalist artists, women whose work also demonstrated an interest in materiality and semi-mechanical repetition, like the smaller scale sculptures of Eva Hesse,[171] and the cast concrete sculptures of Beverly Buchanan (1940-2015), whose *Wall Fragment/Ga (Revised Arrangement)* was also part of

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[169] Rosalind Krauss et al., "The Reception of the Sixties," *October* 69 (Summer, 1994): 9.

[170] Kapur notes this via Jean-François Lyotard. Kapur, *When Was Modernism in Indian Art?*, 298-99.

[171] Much of the German-born American artist Eva Hesse's work was at a much larger scale than Zarina's sculptural works. The exception are Hesse's smaller "test pieces" that Briony Fer renames "studioworks," whose much smaller scale is akin to that of Zarina's sculptures, while their provisional nature is not. See Briony Fer, *Eva Hesse: Studiowork* (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 2009).

the "Third World Women" issue.[172] While Eva Hesse worked largely with synthetic, industrial materials such as plastic, latex, and fiberglass, and molded them into organic forms, Zarina only ever worked with organic, non-industrial materials—primarily paper—that the artist likened to working with skin.[173] Unlike Buchanan's process of assembling totemic, site-specific, cast concrete sculptures, then photographing and rearranging them, Zarina's work was siteless and, once executed, was complete and never reworked, only subject to the ravaging effects of time. Hesse and Buchanan's sculptures lay on the ground, hung from ceilings, or were placed outdoors, encouraging circumambulation, whereas Zarina's work hung flat against the wall, and encouraged a slow encounter over time. Zarina's practice at the time linked minimalism's scale, durational spectatorship, and interaction with architecture with Post-Minimal work that privileged organic materials and visceral affect.

Rosalind Krauss laid out the relationship between sculpture, architecture, and landscape in postwar American art in her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." The critic details the ways in which historians and critics were casting back millennia to create genealogies for "sculpture" that obscured what it in fact was. Sculpture, Krauss argues, "was inseparable from the logic of the monument," it was a "commemorative

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[172] Blocton et al., ed., "Third World Women," 48. In the late 1970s, the artist Beverly Buchanan made a series of cast concrete sculptures exploring Southern vernacular architecture, of which *Wall Fragment/Ga (Revised Arrangement)* was a part.

[173] Paper "is an organic material, almost like human skin, you can scratch it, you can mold it, it even ages." Zarina in conversation with the writer S. Kalidas, Gallery Espace, New Delhi, January 21, 2011. See also: Geeti Sen, "A conversation with Zarina in New York," in *Zarina: Paper Houses*, exhibition catalogue (New Delhi: Gallery Space, 2007); Pesenti, *Zarina: Paper Like Skin*, 13-31.

representation."[174] Western modernist sculpture, according to Krauss, swallowed the pedestal or base of monuments, becoming "nomadic," and rendered the human body in "radical abstractness," further testifying "to a loss of site, in this case the site of the rest of the body."[175] In the postmodern phase, according to Krauss, sculpture enters "the expanded field" in "which the modernist category *sculpture* is suspended."[176]

Zarina's work troubles the relationship of sculpture to architecture as theorized by Krauss. Sculpture as Krauss describes it would have been part of colonial-modernist monuments erected by the British in India in the late 19th century. One such example was the series of monumental sculptures placed on plinths in North Delhi's Coronation Park, where Queen Victoria was represented alongside renditions of Mughal emperors and British rulers, in an attempt to situate the British as the inheritors of the legacy of Mughal rule, though it now sits in Delhi College of Art. Zarina's work is situated in the historical rupture of partition and independence and in lieu of colonial-modern sculpture, cites pre-colonial architectural elements in which sculptural expression is inseparable from architecture—the friezes, reliefs, engravings and calligraphic carvings

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[174] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 33. Krauss defines sculpture solely in relation to Western colonial modernism, against the connections made by historicist writers situating the work of postwar artists in relation to pre-modern forms such as Indian burial grounds or Toltec ball courts, which for Krauss were "not sculpture." She further defined the category through monuments to the power of the state and the church—the ancient Roman equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius that represents "modern, Renaissance Rome," and the 17th century Vatican commission of *Vision of Constantine* by Bernini are given as examples. Sculpture is similarly defined by Lucy Lippard in her essay "Eccentric Abstraction," as "rooted in a heroic and funereal representation left over from the nineteenth century." Lucy Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," in *Changing Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., INC., 1971) 100.

[175] Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 33.

[176] Ibid., 38-39.

that were part of precolonial Indo-Persian architecture across the subcontinent. Her work relates to these calligraphic friezes in both their sculptural quality, figure ground relation that the artist evokes in her sculptures, such as *Corners* and translates as plays on light and shadow in her black and white prints.

The paper-pulp sculptures that Zarina made in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s all employ architecture as a referent. The citations are also in the titles of the work—*Wall, Homes, Steps, Ghar, Phool*—words that are not universal but describe architectural forms with cultural associations.[177] Her sculptures are distillations drawn from the artist's memory—inhabiting a house on stilts in Bangkok in *Homes* (1981) or the pre-modern, pre-colonial architecture of baolis (step wells) in northern India in *Steps* (1981, fig. 13). In *Homecoming* (1981), one of a series of square works, the cool shade provided by the arches surrounding the courtyard of the artist's childhood home in Aligarh find themselves as recesses in the ground of a square set within another square. Her arched niches draw from the representation of courtyards in 18th century maps that used non-perspectival, miniature techniques of representing space in plan and elevation view simultaneously.[178] In *Wall* (1979, fig. 12), a square grid with recessed cubes set

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[177] Ghar means home, house and dwelling in Hindi-Urdu. Phool means flower, but in this work of the artist's it refers to jasmine, which is native to the region and has very fragrant flowers. People often wear garlands of the fresh flowers around their wrists, in their hair, or looped into their earrings, and purchase them from merchants selling them strung on threads throughout the city.

[178] See Ottoman Turkish map of the courtyard of Mecca from 1787 as well as Mughal South Asia floor plans of the same Kaaba from the 1880s. These maps combine what may be described as an unfolded architectural elevation with a plan view due to their incorporation of multiple perspectives within the two-dimensional representations.

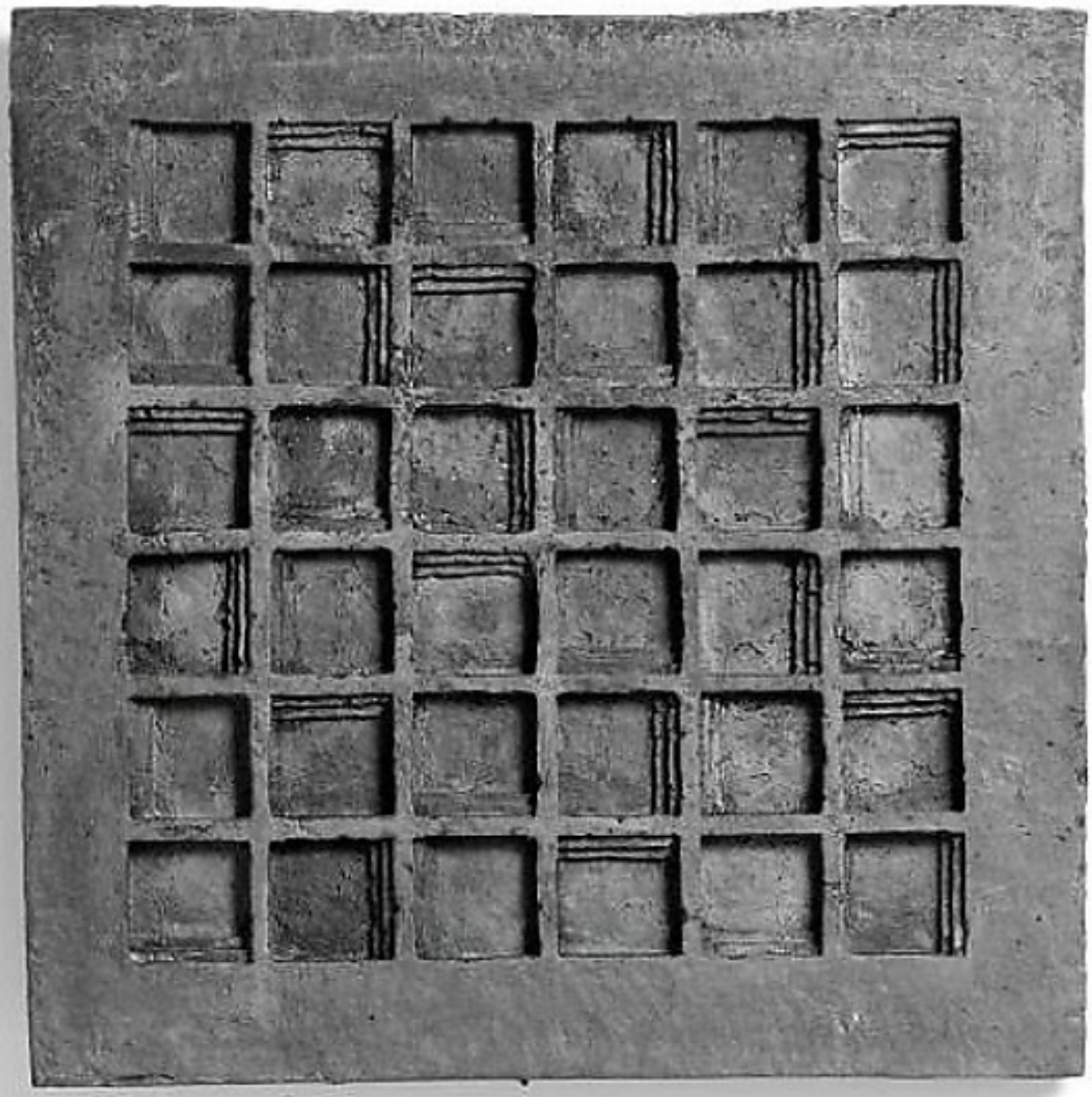

FIGURE 13. ZARINA, *STEPS* (1981)

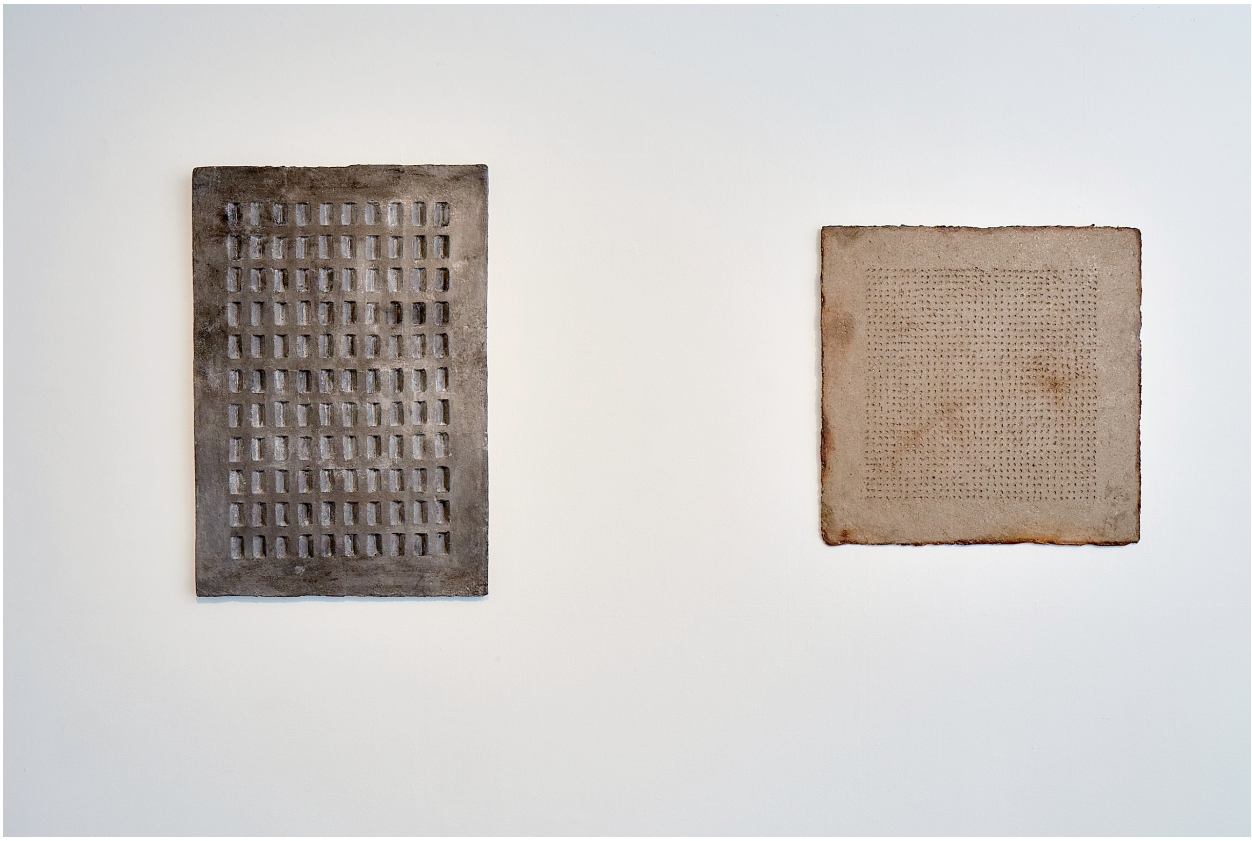

FIGURE 14. INSTALLATION VIEW OF *SOFT AND WET*, CURATED BY SADIA SHIRAZI, THE ELIZABETH FOUNDATION OF THE ARTS, PROJECT SPACE, NEW YORK CITY, SEPTEMBER 18 - NOVEMBER 16, 2019. WORKS: ZARINA, *CORNERS*, 1980; ZARINA, *I WHISPERED TO THE EARTH*, 1979. PHOTOGRAPH BY MATT VICARI

within it, and in *Corners* (1980, fig. 14 and 15), we find the recessed, faceted geometry of a rectangular niche, repeated row after row. The matrix of the ground in these works contains its figural recesses, negative and positive space articulated through a thickened ground within which the work is itself formed. *Wall* and *Corners* both cast shadows internally within the piece, through their cubic and faceted dimensions respectively. The dark, triangulated shadows in *Corners* are visible regardless of how it is illuminated or where the viewer stands, and resemble the form of the taaq, a small niche, found in Indo-Persian architecture across South and West Asia. The artist wrote about her work and the influence that temple architecture in Japan had, alluding to the ways in which

one form reminded her and evoked the memory of other times and spaces, in the catalogue of the exhibition *Dialectics of Isolation:* "I looked into Mt. Aso filled with burnt ashes/ walked the corridors of temples with rows of niches/ blackened by the smoke of oil lamps/ lamps lighted for the dead/ silently came to my corner."[179] Zarina's work does not suspend the relation between figure and ground; instead she refuses the figure except in as much as it is a thickened ground.[180]

Zarina's sculptures resist two dimensions.[181] *Corners* evokes an interiority, a positive cast of the negative space of a niche, or even the corner of a room, where walls, a ceiling and a floor all meet at right angles. Unlike the casts of negative space from existing buildings at 1:1 scale by Rachel Whiteread, Zarina's sculptures are fragments drawn completely from memory and scaled down. Consistent with her later print works on paper that envisage moments in time through their material/visual registers —through the way shadow hits the ground at a particular time of year, or how the turning blades of a fan are viewed from the perspective of a prone body in the summer monsoon season in *Home is a Foreign Place* (2001)—this corner, too, is conjured from

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[179] Zarina, "Zarina," in *Dialectics of Isolation*, 18.

[180] In his observations on Prabhavathi Meppayil's work, Benjamin Buchloh writes that in the conventions of orthodox minimalist aesthetics relations are suspended between figure and ground, although Zarina's work does not do this due to its investment in early modern Indian architecture. Benjamin Buchloh, "Prabhavathi Meppayil : Redeeming Abstraction (under Duress)," in *Prabhavathi Meppayil: nine seventeen*, exhibition catalogue (London: Pace London, 2014), 49.

[181] Unlike Rasheed Araeen's series of colorful truss sculpture *Rang Baranga* (1969), which he prefers to light so it casts no shadows and reads like a drawing hung on a wall. Rasheed Araeen in conversation with the author, Aicon Gallery, New York City, 2018. This sculpture is part of his "structures" series from the late 1960s executed in London, where he migrated to from Karachi in 1964.

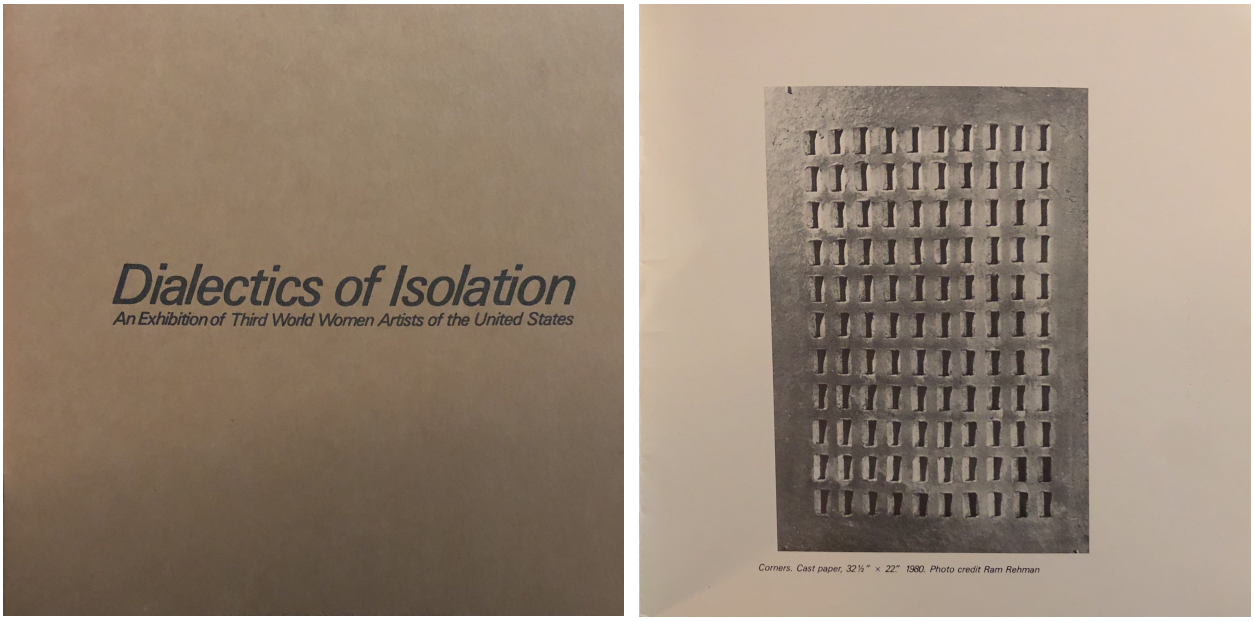

FIGURE 15. ANA MENDIETA, KAZUKO MIYAMOTO, AND ZARINA, *DIALECTICS OF ISOLATION*, EXHIBITION CATALOGUE (1980). ZARINA, *CORNERS* (1980), PHOTOGRAPHED BY RAM RAHMAN.

memory. Zarina no longer had access to the spaces she evoked and instead explored spatial memory through registers beyond the ocularcentric, employing multi-sensory modes that combine vision, touch, and the olfactory.

These works are somewhere between the way a person encounters a book and an architectural frieze, before sculpture was stripped away from architecture to become freestanding. In pre-colonial South Asia, sculpture was part of architecture and disentangleable from ornament, clearly seen in the sculpted red sandstone and marble surfaces that comprise Mughal, Buddhist, and Hindu architecture in Delhi.[182] Multiple niches were nested to frame archways, sculptured lintels adorned balconies, balustrades, and the bases of elevated platforms; there were borders around doorways often inset with precious stones in elaborate patterns, all incorporating either vegetal

[182] Sang tarashi in Urdu means carving or sculpting a material, stone, wood, metal, etc. The Urdu word naqashi, which is drawn from Persian, means making design, pattern, or engraving.

and animal designs or calligraphy drawn from Persian poetry and verses from the Quran. Zarina takes a cue from these calligraphic and sculptural carvings that were part of architecture and also adorned the pages of Mughal manuscripts, adapting them into work that is situated between an illuminated manuscript page and a fragment of a building. Her work is held in a triangulated relation between the structure it hangs upon and the viewer's gaze, which the object stabilizes. Zarina's work demands a time-based encounter between the viewer and the object in space.

A year after working on the *Heresies* "Third World Women" issue, Zarina co-curated *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* at A.I.R. Gallery in 1980 with Ana Mendieta and Kazuko Miyamoto (fig. 15).[183] Mendieta and Miyamoto were then the only "women of color" in the feminist

[183] See Kat Griefen, "Ana Mendieta at A.I.R Gallery, 1977–82," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 21, no. 2 (July 2011): 177–81. See also: Carrie Rickey, "The Passion of Ana," *Village Voice,* September 10–16, 1980, 75. This review is largely responsible for the valorization of Ana Mendieta over the other two co-curators, though I contend the exhibition was a truly collaborative project. See: Sadia Shirazi, "Returning to Dialectics of Isolation: The Non-Aligned Movement, Imperial Feminism, and a Third Way," *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2021), https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.11426.

cooperative A.I.R. Gallery and had mounted shows there.[184] Zarina was not—her application had recently been rejected.[185] The artists shared frustrations with the feminist movement's dismissal of Third World women and their struggles, as well as an art world that invisibilized their histories—Mendieta was a refugee from Cuba and Miyamoto, like Zarina, was a recent immigrant (from Japan). Working together, these three friends shared the labor of the exhibition and used the platform given them to share space and resources with other Third World women, who would never have had

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[184] The term "women of color" was coined by Black women from Washington D.C. who were participating in a National Women's Conference held in Houston in 1977. This group wrote "The Black Women's Agenda" (BWA) in response to a scant three page "Minority Women's Plank" that the organizers of the conference had put together in a 200 page document. At the conference, other groups of minority women asked to join the BWA and they agreed. Through this alliance, the term "women of color" was created as a commitment of political solidarity to work with other minoritized women of color, and not as a biological (ethnic or racial) claim. See Western States Center, "Loretta Ross: The origin of the phrase 'women of color,'" YouTube video, 2:59, February 15, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82vl34mi4Iw. The term was also used in the Combahee River Collective Statement, released the same year, which centered both Black women and coalition-building with other women of color to resist the interlocking oppressions of race, class, gender, and heterosexism. The Third World Women's Alliance was a socialist organization founded in New York City that first began as the Black Women's Liberation Committee (BWLC) in 1968, a caucus of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). See: Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah Eisenstein (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979): 362-72; Stephen Ward, "Third World Women's Alliance," in *Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (London: Routledge, 2013), 141.

[185] Zarina recounted how she faced racism from "white, middle-class women" who thought she was upper-class because of her fluency in English. In the mid-1970s, Indian immigration to the United States was primarily of professionals under the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ECFMG) program that filled the void left by American physicians who were serving in Vietnam during the war. The category "South Asian" came into currency within the diaspora after the 1990s, evolving out of "Third World" and national identities, to create solidarity across various identity groups under the nomenclature of region. Prior to the 1990s, when the category of "Muslim" emerges in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid and is placed upon Muslim citizens to differentiate them from the now hegemonic Hindu Indian, artists such as Zarina, Gulam Mohammaed Sheikh, Nasreen Mohamedi, and others would only have been identified and self-identified as "Indian." After the 1990s, Zarina would continually described as "Muslim" in India and "South Asian" in writing on the artist by critics and historians alike, although the artist would repeatedly say she was "Indian" while also not refusing her religious background, as a way of refuting the idea that her religious identity in some way was incompatible with her national identity. Zarina in conversation with the author, New York, 4 February 2018.

the chance to exhibit their work in male-dominated museums and galleries, but were also excluded from feminist art spaces, which white women dominated.

Howardena Pindell, who was also included in the show, was a foundational figure in the history of A.I.R. Gallery as one of the twenty artists who co-founded the cooperative in 1972, and the only non-white woman. Pindell recalled that every time she mentioned race in meetings, she was accused of bringing up something "political" and, although she tired of this, it was the fees that ultimately led to her departure three years later.[186] Mendieta, who joined the gallery in 1979, became frustrated with the meetings and began missing them within a year, and even tried to sell her membership outright to an artist whose application had been rejected.[187] Pindell observed of that time, "what the white male's voice was to the white female's voice, the white female's voice was to the woman of color's voice."[188] Ana Mendieta said it more succinctly: "They were cunts."[189]

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[186] There was no sliding scale structure that could accommodate variable factors affecting artists' ability to pay these fees—for instance, by considering the differing incomes of single versus married women. Pindell noted that most of its members were married women with dual household incomes who could afford the fees, whereas she supported herself through full-time work at the MoMA and could not. Howardena Pindell in conversation with the author, New York, October 31, 2019.

[187] Mendieta was a member of A.I.R. Gallery for four years, from 1979-1982. She tried to sell her membership to the artist Judy Blum, who decided against the purchase while appreciating the humor of the situation and Mendieta's frustration with the membership selection process. Blum mentioned that Nancy Spero kindly reached out to her afterward to voice her frustration regarding Blum's rejection. Judy Blum in conversation with the author, September 6, 2019, and April 6, 2021. See also Ana Mendieta's resignation letter, October 19, 1982, MSS 184, box 11, folder 440, A.I.R. Gallery Archive, New York.

[188] Howardena Pindell, "Free, White and 21," *Third Text* 6, no. 19 (1992): 31. Pindell remains committed to internationalism through her advocacy of Indigenous artists, Black women, and other non-white artists to the present day.

[189] Blum in conversation with the author, September 6, 2019, New York.

The artists in *Dialectics of Isolation* included Judith F. Baca, Beverly Buchanan, Janet Olivia Henry, Senga Nengudi, Lydia Okumura, Howardena Pindell, Selena Whitefeather, and Zarina. The exhibition catalogue contains a short introductory text by Mendieta that elucidates the political framework of the exhibition, along with two-page spreads for each of the artists, featuring an image of the artist's work on one side, and the artist's own writing reflecting on their work and process on the other. Nengudi and Buchanan reflect on their process-based practices. Buchanan details the thoughtful, slow process in making her cast cement work *Wall Column* (1980, fig. 16): "Placing each piece involves a long time of looking and moving—shifting—replacing and looking some more."[190] Zarina, who was then experimenting with paper and making soft sculptures, exhibited *Corners* (1980). This piece brought together her previous work in collaged-wood relief prints in Delhi and her interest in Indo-Persian architecture with the influence of New York's minimalist and post-minimalist movements. Although the grey sculpture looked as if it were hewn from stone, it was made from pulped paper mixed with water and tinted with graphite powder and then compressed in a mold. Zarina's writing on *Corners* is a poetic meditation on nature, death, and dreams. The artist was moved by the funereal architecture of Japan, and draws from her memories and experiences living and working there.[191]

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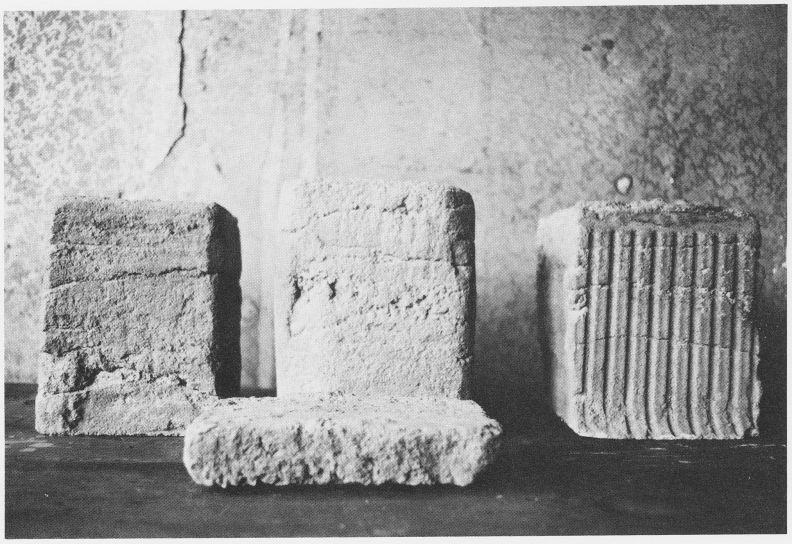
[190] Beverly Buchanan, "Beverly Buchanan," in *Dialectics of Isolation: Third World Women Artists in the United States* (New York: A.I.R. Gallery, 1980), 6.

[191] Zarina, "Zarina," in *Dialectics of Isolation*, 18.



Wall Column. Cast Cement, 18″ × 29″ × 10″

FIGURE 16. BEVERLY BUCHANAN, *WALL COLUMN* (1980)

Buchanan's sculptures were red tinged, they bore traces of the process used to cast them, also evident in Buchanan's *Wall Column*. Four blocks of concrete were arranged directly on the ground, with grooves in them, and the sculptures looked somewhere between architectural spolia and sedimented layers of geological strata. Nengudi's *Swing Low* (1977) hung from the ceiling and wall, the nylon mesh (pantyhose) stretching from being pulled, pinned, and also weighted with sand, two pendulum-like forms evoking the breasts of a human body. Portable segments of Baca's

large, social realist mural *Uprising of the Mujeres* (1979) was also exhibited, and Baca's catalogue text noted the importance of public art's access to broader segments of the population. Whitefeather exhibited a black and white photograph of a shrub, *Webbed Nests at Branch Crotches* (undated), that was part of a larger series on plant and animal life and its relationship to the land. The exhibition also included an installation by Lydia Okumura and Janet Olivia Henry's assortment of small objects (oars, clothing, baseball bat, briefcase) that made up *Juju Box for a White Protestant Male* (1979-80), in which "each item represents a word, a clump of things together to make a sentence."[192]

In the introductory text of the *Dialectics of Isolation* catalogue, Mendieta unequivocally states that feminism in the United States was "basically a white middle class movement" that, to put it kindly, "failed to remember" Third World women.[193] Mendieta, Zarina, and Miyamoto insisted on a dialectical method, seeking political affiliations while refusing to assimilate into liberal feminist politics.[194] After indicting the feminist movement and the gallery, Mendieta does something remarkable—she

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[192] Janet Oliva Henry, "Janet Olivia Henry," in *Dialectics of Isolation,* 6.

[193] Ana Mendieta, "Introduction," in *Dialectics of Isolation,* 1.

[194] It bears mentioning that *Dialectics of Isolation* was not the only show critiquing the feminist movement while creating space for other formal and feminist practices by non-white women. Precedents existed of exhibitions organized by African American women, including the remarkable *"Where We At" Black Women Artists: 1971* at the Acts of Art Gallery and *11* (1975) curated by Faith Ringgold at the Women's Interarts Center. *Where We At* was curated by Nigel Johnson in his West Village gallery and led to the subsequent formation of the collective "Where We At" Black Women Artists INC. (WWA). The artists included Dindga McCannon, Kay Brown, Faith Ringgold, Carol Blank, Jerri Crooks, Charlotte Kâ (Richardson), and Gylbert Coker, amongst others. See: Valerie Smith, "Abundant Evidence: Black Women Artists of the 1960s and 1970s," in *WACK!*, 400- 413; Kay Brown, "The Emergence of Black Women Artists: The Founding of 'Where We At," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 29 (Fall 2011): 118-127; Faith Ringgold, "Bio & Chronology," Faith Ringgold, News, Appearances, Exhibitions, Permissions and Projects, http://faithringgold.blogspot. com/2007/03/bio-chronology.html (accessed November 1, 2019).

turns away from the white gaze. "This exhibition," writes Mendieta, "points not necessarily to the injustice or incapacity of a society that has not been willing to include us, but more towards a personal will to continue being 'other.'"[195] The exhibition points to a third way.

From the 1970s through the 80s, "Third World" meant many things. The term emerged in the wake of World War II, out of the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference. It denoted a geographic territory as well as a temporality of capitalist development, in which the Third World was a pejorative term of belatedness in a teleological development narrative led by the First World. In the United States, it was used as a term to describe non-whites, akin to the term *Black* in Britain which was, in the 1970s and '80s, an identity which then referred broadly to postcolonial migrants. According to Mendieta, the artists in *Dialectics of Isolation* shared the concerns of the Non-Aligned nations, by which she meant the movement which was founded at the Belgrade Conference.[196]

In the United States, Third World was a broad category used for a range of non-national identities and sexual orientations, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Latin American, Asian, Gay and Lesbian, amongst others. Beyond these definitions and usages, Third World also denoted a "third way"—of other futures and political

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[195] Mendieta, "Introduction," *Dialectics of Isolation,* 1.

[196] The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) emerged out of the previous Bandung Conference (1955). This was followed by a subsequent conference in Belgrade in 1961 (where Latin America was represented by Cuba, which joined after the revolution), and a third in Cairo in 1964.

imaginaries. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak bemoaned the fact that the third way "was not accompanied by a commensurate intellectual effort" in the "cultural field" beyond the simple binary of nationalism or anti-imperialism.[8] The history of Third World women is largely ignored in analyses of the failure of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and it is here that *Dialectics of Isolation* should be situated, propelling us elsewhere—beyond the limits of old binaries as well as newer forms of nationalism, towards the creation of "other" collectivities.

Zarina and many other artists like her prove challenging for Western art historians who cannot think post-war art alongside the post-independence era, nor feminism in translation, with North-South as well as South-South points of contact.[197] Her work demands thinking through multiple entangled geographic sites, histories, and temporalities together, which her later work, in which she moves from standalone prints to working with a series of prints in arranged portfolios to her wall installation works that draw together the influences of Minimalism and Post-Minimalism with that of Indian modernism.

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[197] For scholarship that situates the post-war alongside anti-colonial movements and foregrounds these artists and their work, see: Kee, *Contemporary Korean Art.* For work on artists of color in Western metropolitan centers, see: Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*; Mercer, *Discrepant Abstraction*. On translation, homolingual and heterolingual address, see: Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 1-17. On translation and gender, see: Jeannine Tang, "The Problem of Equality, or Translating 'Woman' in the Age of Global Exhibitions," in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures, and Curatorial Transgressions*, ed. Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 244-259.

A Postcolonial Grid

In the 1990s, Zarina began making a series of reconfigurable, gridded wall installations that built upon the themes of memory, trauma, migration, and displacement that had preoccupied her for decades. Although the artist had already worked extensively with printmaking techniques on paper, such as relief, woodblock, lithography, and etching, producing singular works with iterative titles that referenced architecture—*Wall, Wall I, Wall II*—she had never arranged multiple prints together into a larger gridded composition. This form of wall installation evolved when the artist returned to printmaking after over a decade focusing exclusively on sculpture.

Before turning her attention to gridded wall works, Zarina explored the interplay between text and image in folios that retained the scale and feel of intimate encounters with books that were beloved by the artist. The folios play with abstraction and figuration, and lie somewhere between the form of a book and diagrammatic proposals for a sculpture. Zarina then moved from these folios with multiple "spreads" to a series of prints she arranged sequentially in a line, in wall hung works such as *Santa Cruz* (1996, fig. 17), in which she incorporates a line of Urdu poetry that she arranges at the exact same height as the horizon line across the works. This poem is the first misra (couplet) of a Faiz Ahmed Faiz poem that expresses a bittersweet sentiment:

ka.ī baar is kā dāman bhar diyā husn-e-do-ālam se
magar dil hai ki is kī ḳhāna-vīrānī nahīñ jaatī

How often it is filled with the beauty of both worlds
and yet the emptiness of my heart remains[198]

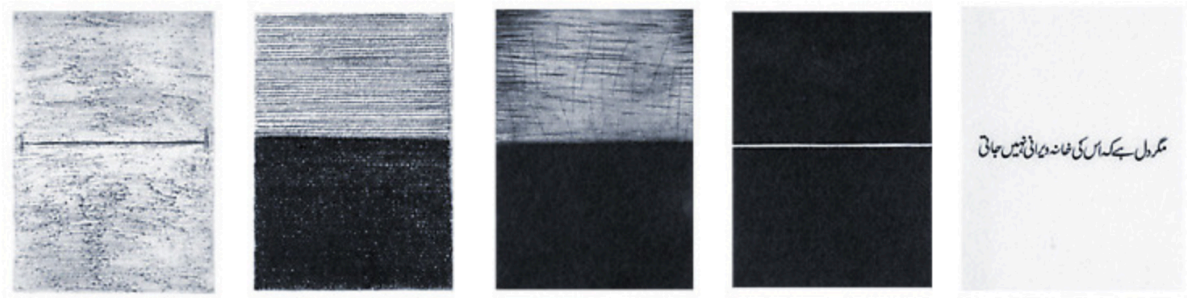

FIGURE 17. ZARINA, *SANTA CRUZ* (1996)

Zarina arranged the line of the second verse of poetry at the exact same height as the horizon line running across the four etchings of the horizon between sky and ocean across the cycle of a day, from morning to night. The beauty of the four etchings contrast with the line of poetry that conveys the melancholia that remains even after encountering such beauty. After these linear works, Zarina's work shifts, not so much in style, as she continues working in spare, black-and white prints with an emphasis on hand-made seriality, but in scale and an increased investment in the haptic, architectural, and mnemonic aesthetics, as the artist assembles prints into large wall-scale installations that I call her postcolonial grids.

In Rosalind Krauss's germinal essay "Grids," she situates the grid "as an emblem of modernity."[199] C.L.R. James, however argues that European colonialism and chattel

[198] Faiz Ahmed Faiz translated by author with Sakina Shirazi.

[199] Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9 (Summer, 1979): 52.

slavery created the very conditions that made modernity possible.[200] Drawing the grid alongside modernity illuminates that Krauss's historicism is part of a theorization of an avant-garde that Fred Moten argues is "embedded in a theory of history" that belies a "geographic-racial or racist unconscious."[201] This theorization forecloses the era of decolonization with which the postwar period was concurrent and excises artists and movements of minorities in the global North, as well as artists from the global South and its diasporas. I contend that colonial practices entrenched aerial perspectives and cartographic methods as extensions of colonial territoriality. Therefore, the grid is an emblem of *colonial* modernity and one that is not confined to Europe.[202] The grid's ubiquity in the art of our century arises instead out of the decolonial methods used by artists who redeployed the grid, and other architectural and geometric forms, drawn from pre-colonial aesthetics, vernacular references, and an inversion of figure-ground relationships in the postwar/post-independence eras. Krauss trains her lens on cubism and the grid's "emergence" and "discovery" in France, and traces the grid back to perspectival studies by Uccello or Leonardo, from which she then differentiates the autonomy of the modernist grid. In contrast, I argue that the grid in Zarina's work cites Japanese woodblock and Indo-Persian miniature painting—part of traditions that do

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[200] C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1963). See also: Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), amongst other texts.

[201] Moten, *In the Break*, 31.

[202] Ibid., 31-32.

not share the realism of "Western" perspective and flatness, which she draws alongside the influences of minimalism and feminist Post-Minimalism. Zarina enables a theorization written in relation to a different set of coordinates of postcolonial modernity as entangled with and part of traditions that exceed the telos and epistemologies of "Western art."

Flatness: An Other Ontology of Abstraction

The flatness and frontality of the early modern tradition of Mughal miniature painting, which Zarina's work engages epistemologically, drew from influences that spanned South, Central, West and Southeast Asia, and from colonial influences from the 13th through the 18th centuries. Mughal painters' use of the grid in the early modern period is at odds with Renaissance artists' deployment in perspectival painting, and offers an alternative epistemology to the "modernist grid" as it refused the stasis of time that one point perspective was premised upon, representing multiple temporalities and non-perspectival space within the frame of one unified image. In *Prison Break* (1562-77, fig. 18), an illustration from a folio page of the Hamza Nama manuscript, architecture is used to create a spatial frame within the frame of the page. The grid here does not appear in the form of glass windows as transparent and opaque, it is space framed by the architecture of a passageway that operates as a portal. It adheres to what John Elderfield writes is the grid's "transfer function" as a framework, but asserts its

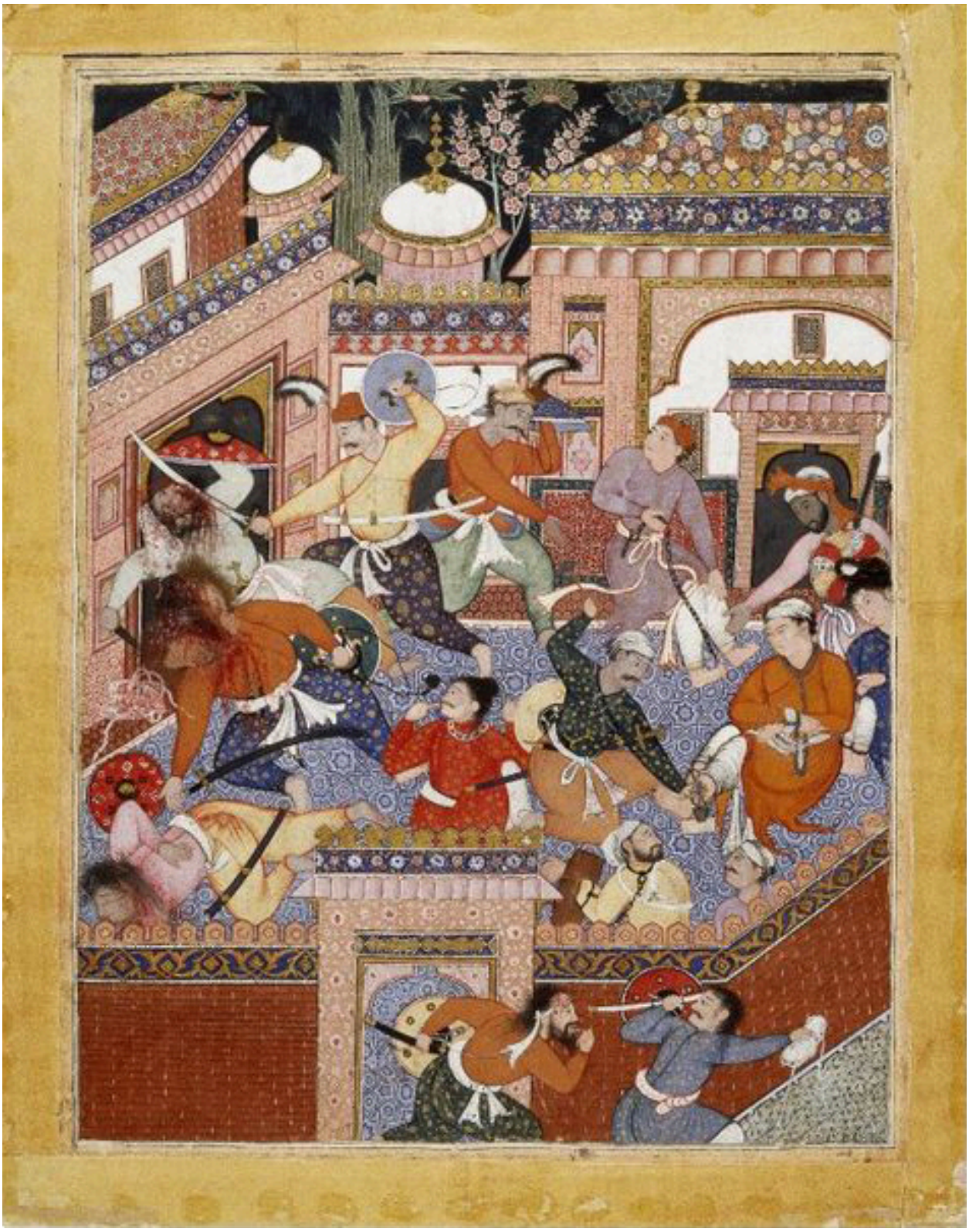

FIGURE 18. ARTIST UNKNOWN, *PRISON BREAK* (1562-77), HAMZA NAMA MANUSCRIPT

difference from both Elderfield and Krauss in that it inhabits multiple temporalities in which the grid is parametric rather than two dimensional.[203] The grid is not simply a mode of separation of art from the world, the mapping of space inside the frame—it is a net in a world that is already complexly rendered and interdicted through multiple space-times.

The courtyard operates as a container and a temporal net. It is where the prison break unfolds as a series of events, presented as multiple stilled moments held together in one space. The figures fighting in the courtyard are represented out of scale, looming over the arched doorways and recesses of the walls behind them. The figures and space are represented flatly, but with a corporeal dynamism. Many stories are being told simultaneously in this one image: one man is already dead, and another is dying, while a third has his neck struck by a sword; another man holds his finger thoughtfully to his chin watching these four men, while another is freeing a prisoner from shackles on his feet, and two men are shown running alongside the exterior wall of the enclosure without using one point perspective. There is an incipient energy and angularity to their bodily gestures that encourage your eyes to crisscross across their movements like atoms swerving in space, moving and colliding, clinamen-like, until they suddenly rest on a moment delicately rendered, revealing a small detail and peculiar expression on a face. The building's depiction also follows this dynamic representational mode. It does

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[203] John Elderfield, "Grids," *Artforum* 10, no. 9 (1972): 53-54. See also Simone Wille, *Modern Art in Pakistan: History, Tradition, Place* (London: Routledge, 2015), 67.

not adhere to one point perspective either, but uses a mix of unfolded elevations and recessions into space. The exterior brick wall wraps around the courtyard and its right portion is tilted at a sharp angle, indicating an understanding of axonometric projection which was preferred to perspective projections. The miniature tradition does not privilege a singular viewer through a representation of a static spatio-temporal condition emblematized by perspectival Renaissance painting, although it does differentiate using other metrics, such as scale, color, and proximity.

These visual representations challenge the singularity of the image that Krauss takes for granted, and in fact do not even subscribe to the idea of a "real-world referent" represented through a single vantage point. These early manuscript paintings and folio works represent multiple temporalities and various spaces simultaneously, held together through an armature of the grid that was rendered more as a parametric device than an industrial grid of right angles that extend equally in all directions.[204] Zarina draws from this inheritance in which the grid is redeployed in ways that refute colonial logics and representations of a singular space-time that are at the center of the imperial myths of modernity and modernism alike.

Drawing from her experiments with paper-pulp sculpture in the 1970s, Zarina elevated handmade paper—a material that is inexpensive, accessible, and recyclable—

[204] Krauss writes, "logically speaking, the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity." Krauss, "Grids," 60.

to the status of sculpture.[205] With her interest in the visceral materiality of paper and the small scale of her works, Zarina demonstrates an affinity with the feminist, Post-Minimalist practices that Lucy Lippard called "eccentric abstraction," but also demonstrates the limited scope of canonical Post-Minimalist discourse.[206] She does not share what Lippard described as its "non-sculptural style," investigations of color, or engagement with perversity and irreverence drawn from Pop Art and surrealism, which evolve out of postwar, post-industrial modernism, because her work is additionally contextualized by uneven geographies and temporalities of postcolonial modernity. Even if, as Briony Fer observed, the stark opposition of Post-Minimalism with Minimalism has become too entrenched, becoming "charged with the significance of revealing all that Minimal art itself had sought to repress," Zarina's work may reveal some of what was repressed, such as the fact that the temporality of the "postwar" was contradicted by ongoing war and decolonial movements across the United States and Western Europe.[207] Perhaps it was the media of printmaking that posed a problem for critics and historians, or simply the challenge diasporic artists like Zarina and her

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[205] Zarina shares an interest in paper's architectural properties with the Japanese architect Shigeru Ban, who also used paper as a building material, and began experiments with paper in the late 1980s. Both the artist and architect consider beauty and aesthetics indivisible from structure and architecture and foreground materiality, labor, and ecology well before the rise of sustainability discourse.

[206] Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," 98-111.

[207] Briony Fer, "Objects Beyond Objecthood," *Oxford Art Journal* 22, no. 2 (1999), 25.

contemporaries might pose for scholars who cannot theorize the postwar period alongside decolonization.[208]

Home Over Nation: *Home is a Foreign Place* (1999)

> Umr guzur gayee translation mein.
> I have lived my whole life in translation.
> —Zarina[209]

The print that begins *Home is a Foreign Place* is *Ghar/Home* (fig. 19 and 20). In it we see a plan view of the artist's family house in Aligarh, a final iteration of an image that has evolved out of its representation in previous stand-alone prints, in which she excavates the house through mnemonic aesthetics and inserts haptic affect where there is usually only a sense of architectural tectonics.[210] The work redeploys the bird's eye view of the architectural floor plan to exceed the functionalist scope of the information usually conveyed. Through this technique for remembering that relies on the architecture of the home to recall and then preserve memory, Zarina imbued the

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[208] Krauss disliked the medium of printmaking and therefore did not study artists working in this medium, believing that modernism adhered only to particular media: "I have to say I hate the medium of printmaking…I think that prints have nothing to do with Modernism and therefore I'm not interested in them as a medium." David Plante, "The Real Thing: An Interview with Rosalind E. Krauss," *artcritical,* August 30, 2013, https://artcritical.com/2013/08/30/rosalind-krauss-interview/.

[209] Zarina Hashmi in conversation with author via phone, April 4, 2016. Translation from Urdu to English by the author.

[210] The first work in which Zarina uses this floor plan is *Father's House 1898-1994/Aba ka Ghar* (1993), which consists of a line drawing extensively annotated with Urdu terms that describe the architectural spaces of the home as well as its flora and fauna. There is bawarchi khanah (kitchen), Ami ka kamra (mother's room) and Aboo ka kamra (father's room), and also the fruit and flowering trees whose fragrances and names in Urdu are inextricably tied to the artist's recollection of living in this house.

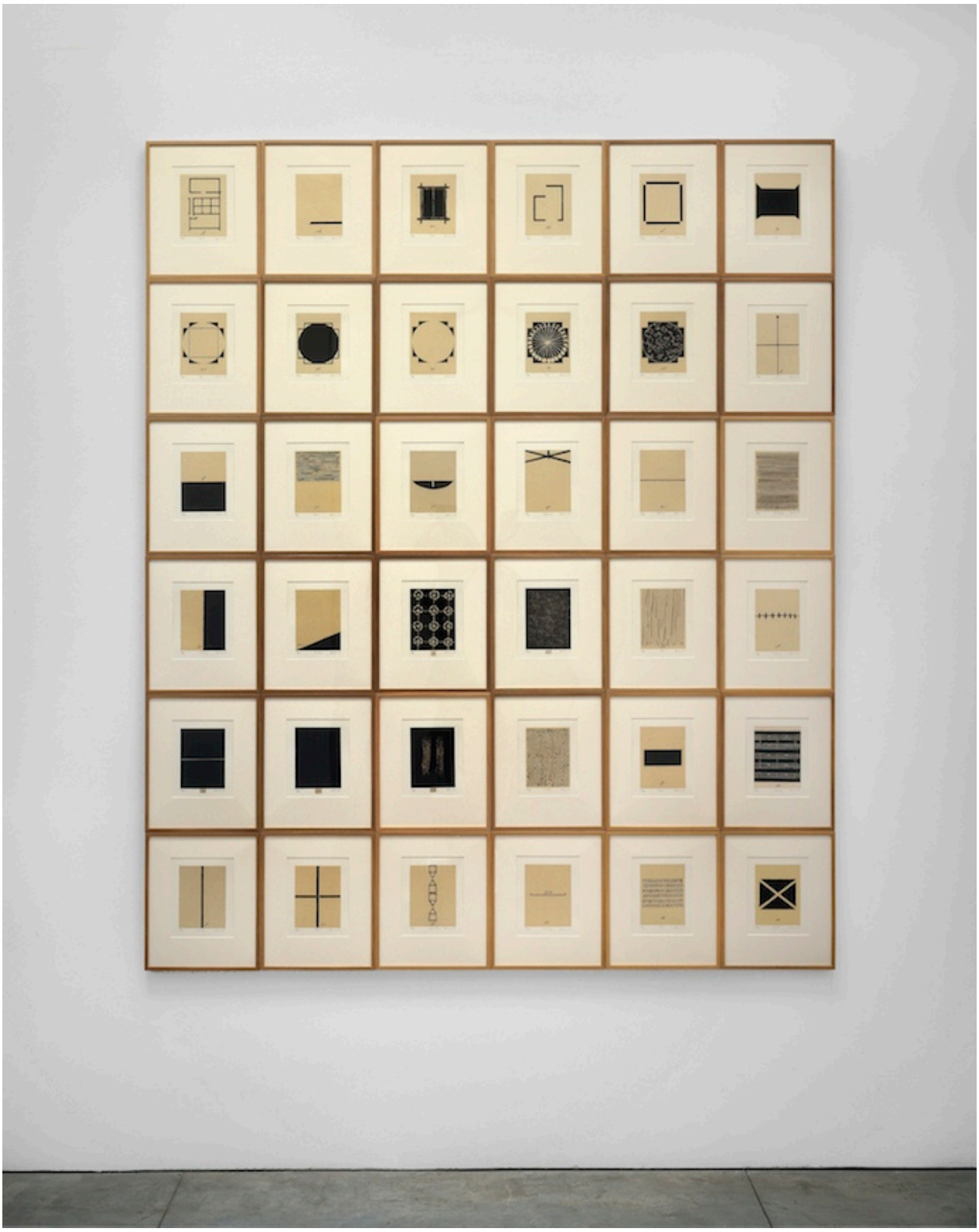

FIGURE 19. ZARINA, *HOME IS A FOREIGN PLACE* (1999)

anodyne language of the floor plan with an affective register—of the afterlife of

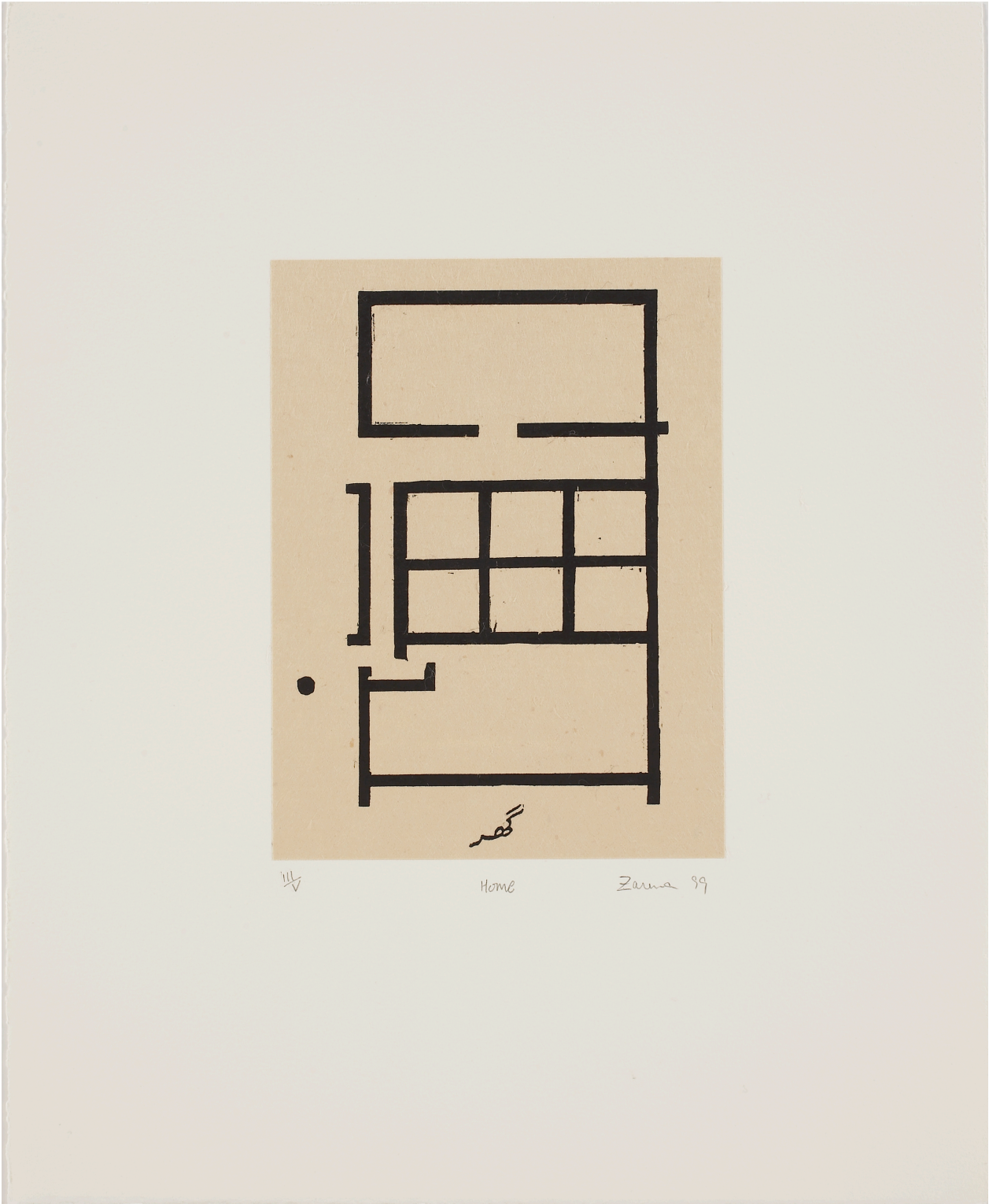

FIGURE 20. *GHAR/HOME* FROM *HOME IS A FOREIGN PLACE* (1999), DETAIL

partition and its impact on minoritarian life—in which she simultaneously deployed the

Urdu language alongside this representation of a building floor plan as yet *another* container or form of "building as dwelling," to use Martin Heidegger's formulation.[211]

Habitation is the *performance* of dwelling, to which *architecture* is supplemental. Dwelling as performance, in its slow temporality, is the embodiment of preservation and care, which *Home is a Foreign Place* poignantly captures, particularly in conditions of insecure or inadequate housing. *Home is a Foreign Place* painstakingly recalls the spatial practices of everyday life that may in fact disappear over time, although architecture may remain. Zarina chose home, a space of preservation and care, over the nation-state, a political space of identification. This is evident in the first row of prints, which deconstruct the architectural plan of the artist's family home using the simplified language of poché, beginning with a floor plan. *Ghar/Home* represents the family's home in Aligarh, with its two entrances and corresponding courtyards; a more accessible upper courtyard, the mardana, is visually penetrable from the street, while the entrance to the lower courtyard of the zenana is circuitous, blocking visual access and affording a higher degree of privacy.[212] A black circle in the image locates us next to the lower entrance of the zenana, or women's space of the home. It is in these domestic, feminine

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[211] Martin Heidegger,"Building, Dwelling, Thinking" in *Poetry*, *Language*, *Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971):145–161.

[212] The zenana describes the women's spaces of the home, and the mardana the space for men, terms that are used to refer to the homosocial division in both Hindu and Muslim households. The zenana included women, children, extended family, and male and female household staff, while strangers, guests and visitors of both genders were hosted in the mardana.

spaces of labor that the rest of the work is located, in spaces of reproduction and habitation that are etched into the artist's memory.

In the next print, *Chaukhat/Threshold*, a thick beveled line tightly constricts the narrow space below it while the space above it feels expansive. The artist relayed the affect of this threshold of entry that exceeds tectonics and is entangled with gender, space, and sociality. The word "chaukhat" has a resonance in Urdu that is not fully conveyed by its translation in English as threshold—it evokes a spatial, temporal, and social condition of entry, as well as beginnings and access. The word can refer to the literal material of the threshold, the wood that lies under a door, or to being on the brink of something. The itinerary that I will take through the rest of the prints in this work will track the black poché that represents walls in *Ghar/Home*, is compressed into a single line in *Chaukhat/Threshold*, and expands to *Diwar/Wall*, a loose perspectival elevation of three walls enclosing a courtyard that moves us out of the omniscient gaze of the plan view. Black is the color of the earth in *Zameen/Land* and also the night sky in *Sitaray/Stars*. It registers scratches in *Dasht/Terror* that are reminiscent of Ana Mendieta's *Body Tracks* from 1974, where the artist dragged her forearms covered in blood and paint across a surface. In *Zabaan/Language* (fig. 21), empty musical staffs are visible against a black page, for musical notation that is as of yet unwritten or perhaps just erased. The last print, *Hudood/Border* (fig. 22) returns us to a black square, bisected from corner to corner into four equilateral triangles, an ominous image akin to a flag of exclusion that

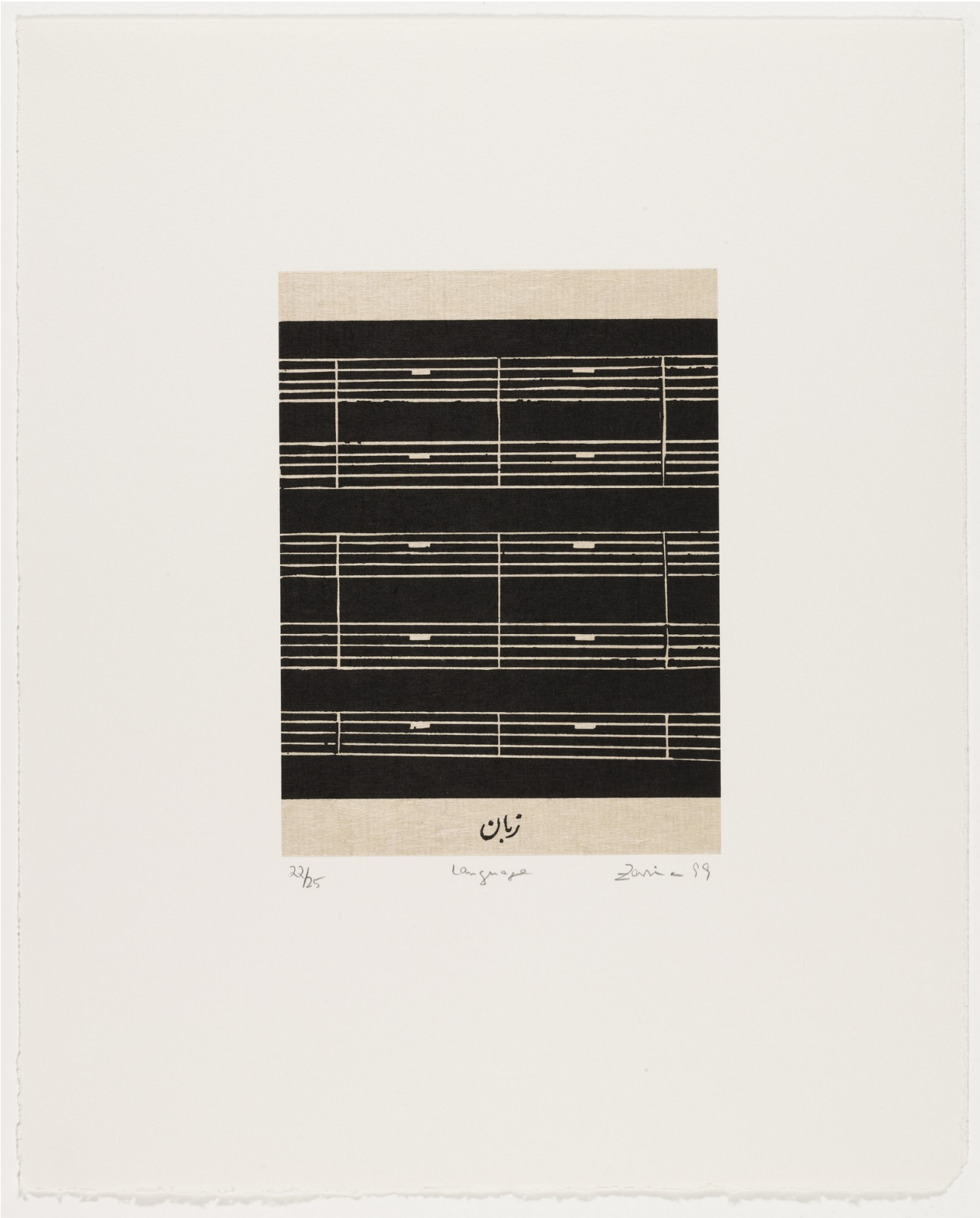

FIGURE 21. ZARINA, *ZABAAN/LANGUAGE* FROM *HOME IS A FOREIGN PLACE* (1999), DETAIL

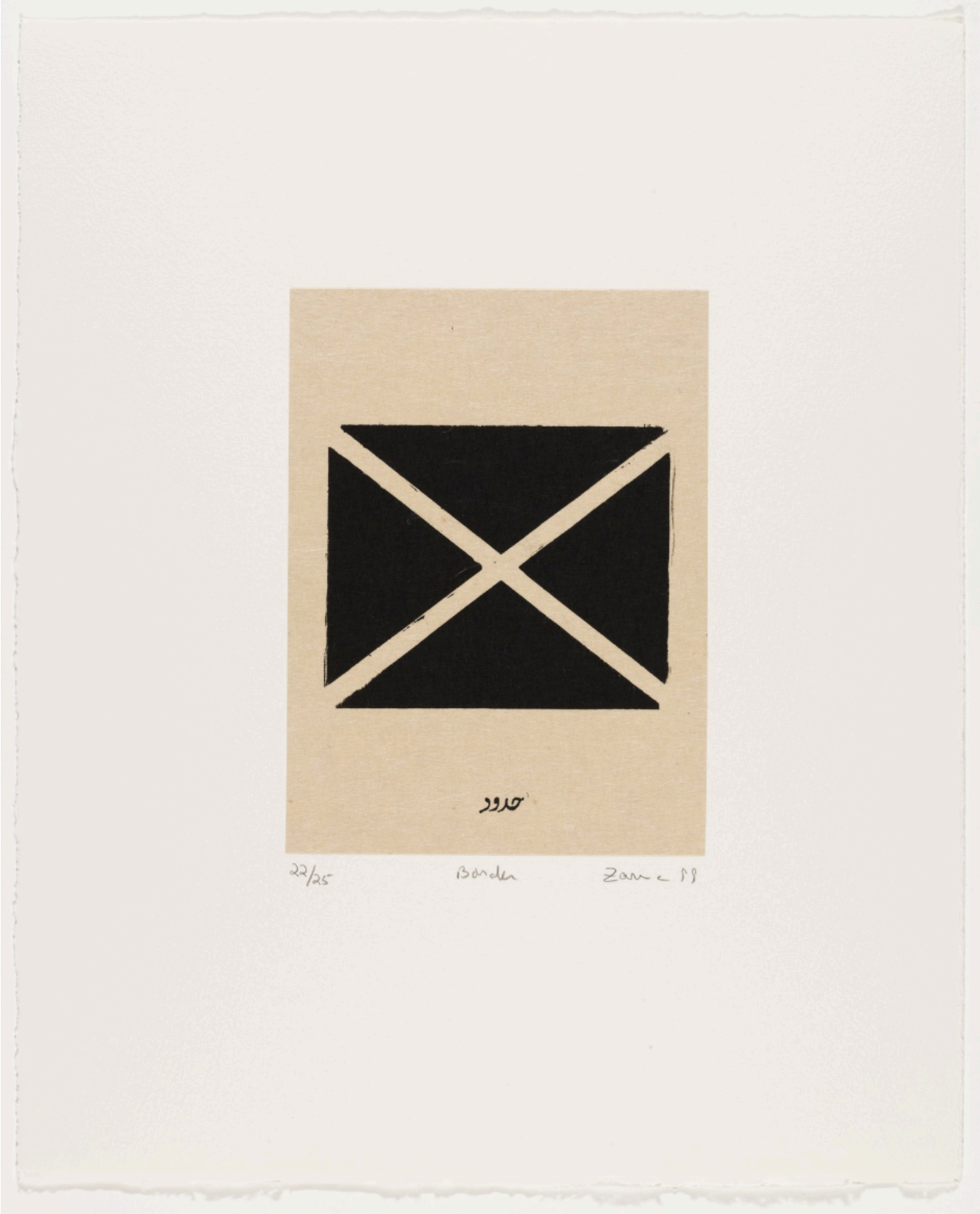

FIGURE 22. ZARINA, *HUDOOD/BORDER* FROM *HOME IS A FOREIGN PLACE* (1999), DETAIL

has taken us far from the interiority of the *Ghar*/*Home*.

Home is a Foreign Place exudes a strong sense of non-national belonging that does not privilege recognition by the nation-state through its adjudication of citizenship, or juridical belonging, and instead privileges domesticity and the performance of dwelling as social practice of belonging that exceeds and predates architecture. In *Home is a Foreign Place,* the representations of fragments of a whole come to characterize an anoriginary home through stilled images conjured by a mnemonic recall of gestures of habitation. Zarina's work gathers multiple prints together, making a whole out of fragments, privileging a multiplicity that is further underscored by their installation in variable grid formations. These representations reimagine the aerial view and the gaze of aerial bombardment by drawing vision together with touch and hapticity.[213]

While Zarina emerged out of a particular linguistic context, I argue that her work engages in heterolingual address: it employs both Urdu and English but it is also "read" visually. This is further complicated by the fact that the Nastaliq calligraphy reads as both verbal and nonverbal, visual and textual, whether or not a viewer is able to read and comprehend the script. Although an understanding of Urdu enriches one's engagement with the work, the work remains accessible through its use of multiple languages. Nevertheless, there is an opacity in Zarina's work, an incommensurability, a

[213] It also refuses iconic, hegemonic representations of national imaginaries, such as that of the flag, for example, or "Mother India" as Bharat Mata (mother/goddess), figures that represent and respect the territorial boundaries of the nation-state. See: Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and The Nation*; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). On the fraught nature of Anderson's "national" categories in the case of Pakistan, see Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*.

lack of equivalence that occurs between the Urdu words and the English translations, between the Urdu word and the image, and between the English word and the image that requires viewers to engage with these gaps and slippages at multiple levels of comprehension. This incommensurability, or what Emily Apter calls the "untranslatable," is not equivalent to "loss" as it is often described vis-a-vis the question of translation.[214] Rather, I argue, something new is forged in her work, as it troubles the stable indexes of what constitutes clear demarcations between visuality and literariness. Translation occurs from Urdu to English, as does counter-translation, from Urdu to the image, from the English to the image, suggesting multiple simultaneous translations and following Sakai's theorization of heterolingual address.[215] *Home is a Foreign Place* staves off disappearance, employing mnemonic aesthetics in the wake of crisis, displacement, and migration as a form of memorialization of everyday life and domesticity. Zarina's work evokes both the affective pull of a home and its incommensurability as a universal signifier, underscoring the need for the multiple, iterative, heterolingual translations that we find in her work.

Although Zarina's work is often discussed as mourning the loss of an originary home and language, I argue that it is an anoriginary home that the artist centered in her work, foregrounding experiences of migration and displacement, against an

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[214] Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013).

[215] Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 8. Undergirding Sakai's writing is a suspicion that, like the nation-state, "the idea of the unity of language as the schema for ethnic and national communality must also be a recent invention." Ibid., 28.

understanding of belonging that is tethered to the nation-state or solely through affiliation with one language. In homolingual address, "the addresser adopts the position representative of a putatively homogenous language society and relates to the general addressees, who are also representative of an equally homogenous language."[216] Her work operates within the logic of heterolingual address: a mode of translation and counter-translation that does not take a single "national, ethnic, or linguist affiliation for granted."[217] In Sakai's heterolingual address, translation is understood to articulate languages through certain representations of the labor of translation prior to which the perceived unity of these languages and communities cannot exist. Drawing Sakai together with Esra Akcan's deployment of theories of translation to think through cross-cultural exchanges in the visual realm, I read the use of Urdu Nastaliq calligraphy as both visual and textual, to extend Aamir Mufti's reading of Urdu as literary.[218] I argue, too, that the artist is not preoccupied with Urdu becoming a national language but with language anterior to ethnicity, prior to the ethno-racialization of Muslims and their conflation with the language in India. The work *Homes I Made: A Life in Nine Lines* (fig. 23), for example, alludes to a home made and remade over and over again, in nine different locations, in which dwelling is understood as a spatial practice, a social reproduction of domesticity and everyday life

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[216] Ibid., 5.

[217] Ibid., 8.

[218] For an excellent study of the application of translation theory beyond the literary, see Akcan, *Architecture in Translation*.

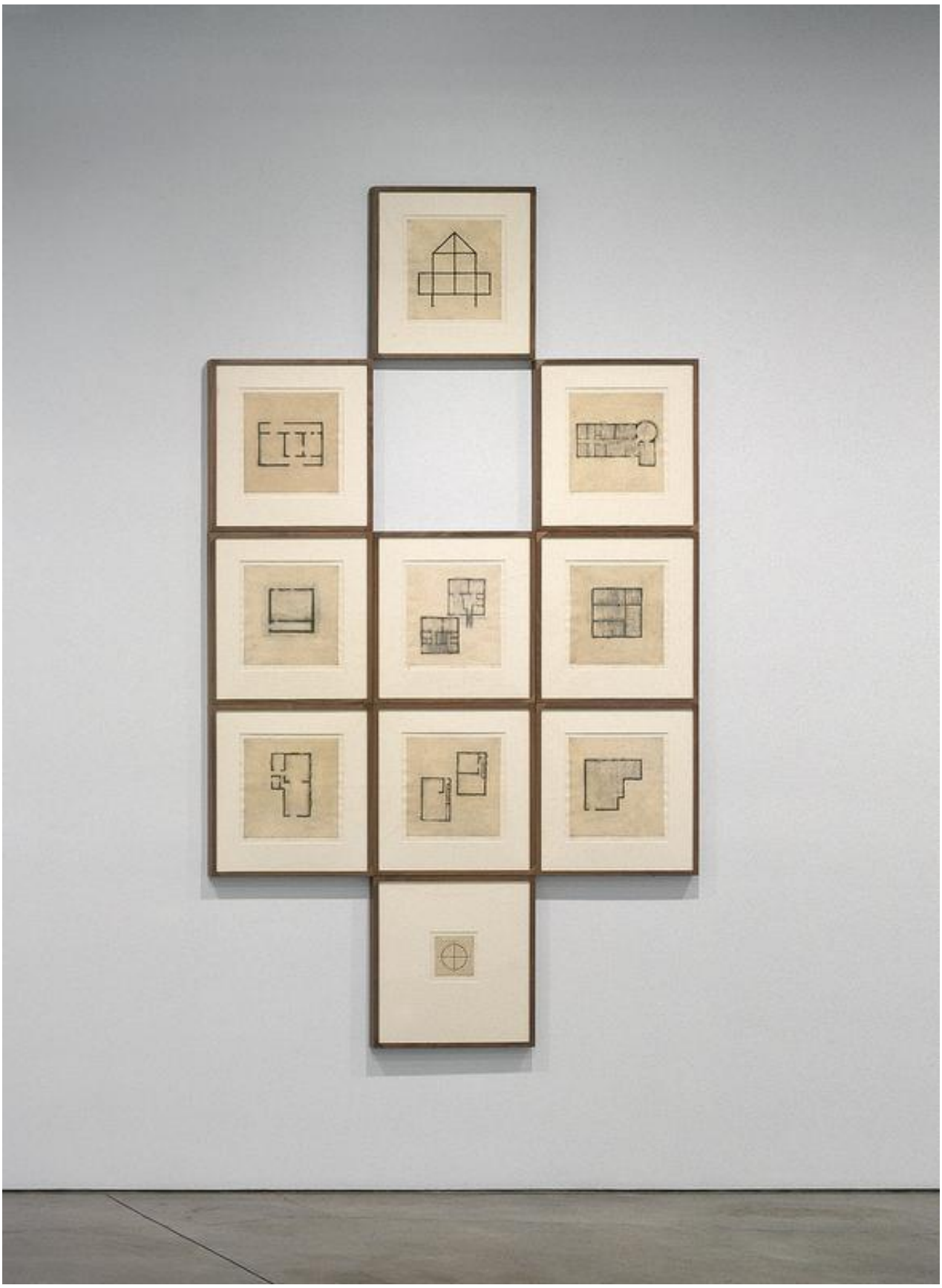

FIGURE 23. ZARINA, *HOMES I MADE: A LIFE IN NINE LINES* (1997)

that does not neatly align with architecture, property ownership, or national belonging.[219]

In *Home is a Foreign Place*, thirty-six black, woodblock prints on hand made Indian paper are arranged in reconfigurable grids that vary depending on their installation—from two grids of six by three, to one larger grid of six by six—condensing the artist's life into discrete, simultaneous movements in her prints.[220] Instead of exhibiting the works in one row, like *Santa Cruz*, or the disturbed grid formation of *Homes I Made/A Life in Nine Lines*, the artist used variable grid formats in which prints aggregate, expand to the scale of a wall, and contract into two horizontal courses.[221] *Homes I Made/A Life in Nine Lines*, consists of nine prints of architectural floor plans that are rendered as simple line drawings displayed in a grid of three by three, with a print displaced above, creating a disturbance in the grid, a gap that indicates an absence. A tenth print is appended below the grid, a compass with its cardinal points oriented to true North, a convention that was introduced by Giambattista Nolli in his 18th century map of Rome. Zarina's cardinal points are written in Urdu—Shumal, Gharb, Sharq and

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[219] For more on "critical social practice" and the production of space as a social product, see: de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

[220] On Euro-American epistemological theorizations of the grid, see: Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October,* Vol. 9, Summer 1979, 50-64. Benjamin Buchloh writes that Meppayil's "non-compositional matrices are inscribed within subtle and manifold variations of the grid, possibly the most universal and also the most rigorous pictorial ordering principle of modernist abstraction (one also deployed in panels for Tantric meditation)." See: Benjamin Buchloh, "Prabhavathi Meppayil : Redeeming Abstraction (under Duress)," *Prabhavathi Meppayil : nine seventeen* (London: Pace London, 2014), 38.

[221] A course is a continuous horizontal row of bricks laid atop one another, making up a wall. They can be load bearing with structural bonds or non-load bearing, referred to as stack bonds in which all the vertical joints are aligned, like Zarina's arrangement of her prints.

Junoob—a reorientation and a re-worlding through language. This work documents the trajectory of the artist's departure from the city of her birth, an event that carries with it a traumatic register, as it sets into motion a dislocation and translation that is intertwined with a longer history of the afterlife of partition.

Other instances of the grid appear in the work of male Minimalists, who emphasized scale and industrial production over Zarina's handmade, episodic approach. Carl Andre's sculptures *144 Lead Square* (1969) and *144 Magnesium Square* (1969) also use a grid formation, for example, but are laid on the ground to be walked upon.[222] Another discordant echo can be detected in both artists' use of found wood; while Andre used timber from construction sites in New York in his *Ladder* works from 1959-64, Zarina's relief prints used smaller fragments of discarded wood from the streets of Nizamuddin in Delhi that she restored, oiled, collaged, and inked onto handmade paper. Here, Zarina used assemblage, a technique that operates as a visual metaphor for displacement and also valorizes the discarded remnants of other modes of production, and restitutes them through care, so that the texture of their skin is the very material texture of the work itself. Minimalist artists shared an apolitical approach to labor and the extraction of industrial materials that was influenced by high modernist architecture's uncritical relationship to capitalism and industrial production. While Zarina's work shares affinities with Minimalism's investment in geometric form and

[222] Carl Andre was Ana Mendieta's husband, and was suspected of murdering his wife, though he was acquitted in court.

materiality, she did not valorize industrial production, nor its artists' depoliticized preference for extractive materials like steel. If Andre valorized the system of industrial labor, where his installations consist of a repetitive action that produces an identical object across multiple sites, Zarina's work was contextual, exemplified by her site-specific installations of *Home is a Foreign Place*'s thirty-six parts that varied depending upon each space in which the work is installed.

The title *Home is a Foreign Place* holds the thirty-six works together through its poetics, underscored by the inscription in each work of an Urdu word from which each image is conjured. The portfolio of prints resembles the representations of Japanese printmaker Utagawa Hiroshige's portfolio of woodblock prints, *100 Famous Views of Edo* (1856-58), which she adapts to represent mnemonic aesthetics associated with the passage of seasons and events over the course of her life, through the framework of "home." Zarina has spoken about the fact that her work arises first out of language and not images, that it is only after jotting down words in Urdu that she conjures what she calls her "idea-images."[223] In Urdu poetry, which the artist drew from in her works from this period, the last word in a line repeats (what is called the "radeef") and creates a larger rhythmic structure across the poem that can shrink itself to the scale of a couplet. The whole is built through partial fragments that retain their status as discrete units retaining an imprint of the poem's structural form, like Zarina's work.

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[223] In Zarina's artistic practice she has often emphasized that words come to her before images. See: "Home is a Foreign Place," *MoMA Learning*, https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/zarina-home-is-a-foreign-place-1999 (accessed July 4, 2018).

While the order of the images remains the same in each installation of *Home is a Foreign Place*, beginning with *Ghar/Home* and ending with *Hudood/Border*, read from left to right, the work's fragmentary structure and its reconfigurable format encourage multiple readings and modes of display. Every viewer's encounter with the work requires that they choose an individualized itinerary with which to read the prints—both its images and its various languages. Each print includes an image related to a word in Urdu, a language that is read from right to left, that is located at the bottom of the print in Nastaliq calligraphy, which the artist translated into English at the periphery of the print, between the edition number and signature.[224]

Zarina was brought up in a multilingual context. Beginning before partition and continuing after, Urdu experienced an Arabization of the language and Hindi a Sanskritization, and although these two languages are mutually intelligible at the level of speech, they became further distinguished on the basis of script, with Urdu written in Nastaliq and Hindi in Devanagari.[225] Urdu came to represent the purported religious identities of its speakers, associated exclusively with Muslims.[226] So, for example, an

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[224] The calligrapher that Zarina worked with is based in Karachi. He would send the artist image files of scans of his work in Nastaliq script that she reversed and then carved into the wood block she printed from. In the few prints that are almost entirely black, Zarina has collaged the Urdu calligraphic subtitles below the print and has not translated them into English. Zarina in conversation with the author, 2016.

[225] See: Tariq Rahman, "Urdu and the Muslim Identity: Standardization of Urdu in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, No. 25 (2010): 83-107; Tariq Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011); Francesca Orsini, *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture* (Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan, 2010).

[226] In the pre-modern period (and even the post-modern across the subcontinent), as Sakai observes, "literacy was comprehended within the context of multiple tongues." Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 20.

artist like Krishen Khanna, whose family was originally from Lahore but were displaced during partition, read, wrote and spoke Urdu as well as Punjabi. While Khanna and Zarina did not share the same religious background nor city of birth, they did share the same languages.[227] Urdu is a language that does not correspond neatly to nation in either India or Pakistan, although it is the national language of the latter, despite being spoken by a minority of its population.[228] *Home is a Foreign Place* arises in this complex postcolonial context in which minoritarian belonging is in flux.

The issue of translation arises in *Home is a Foreign Place* in two ways: verbal, beginning with the interplay between Urdu and English, and non-verbal, in the translation from text to image as well as in text read *as image*. In "Zarina Hashmi and the Arts of Dispossession," Aamir Mufti emphasizes narratives of loss in the artist's work.[229] He attributes her use of Urdu calligraphy to a preoccupation with Urdu text and issues of belonging, loss, and homelessness. I would amend this to say that Zarina's work is instead preoccupied with issues of translation and borders, demonstrating the fissures between cartographic images of the nation-state and representations of its

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[227] Krishen Khanna in conversation with the author, Delhi, May 2017.

[228] For more on the linguistic differentiation of Hindi and Urdu as a colonial project, see Aamir R. Mufti, "Orientalism and the language of Hindustan," *Critical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (October 2010): 63-68. In India, Urdu is one of the many constitutionally recognized languages and is the official language in five of India's states. It is also spoken widely through the United Arab Emirates and diasporic populations across the world. See also Madhumita Lahiri, "An Idiom for India: Hindustani and the Limits of the Language Concept," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 1 (2016): 60-85.

[229] Mufti, "Zarina Hashmi and the Arts of Dispossession," 174-196.

territorial and bodily enclosure.[230] While Mufti highlights Zarina's investment in Urdu due to her repeated use of Nastaliq calligraphy, which he reads as literary, I foreground her work's play with calligraphic text *as* image, and the translation between text and image, as well as between languages, as the modes of translation and counter-translation that arise in her work.[231] Counter to narratives of loss associated with the Urdu language, I argue that it is not the language that the artists mourns, but the contours of a pre-modern, linguistic community that was multi-ethnic and not yet ethno-racialized, rendered homogenous in the association of Urdu with Muslims. Zarina emblematizes a citizen, who, despite her citizenship, comes to constitute the nation's outside, an excess against which the modern Indian citizen-subject is now defined. Manu Goswami argues that Indian anti-colonial nationalism delimited a hierarchical order of national subjects "in order to preserve the imagined nation against contamination from both the perceived abstraction of the colonial present and the particularist foreign body of the Muslim."[232] Zarina is preoccupied with borders, translation, and cartographies that index modes of unbelonging characteristic of minoritarian life and the precarity of citizenship in the modern nation-state, emblematized by the Muslim citizen-subject. Zarina's work responds to these questions

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[230] See Naoki Sakai, "Translation and the Schematism of Bordering," Translating Society: A Commentator's Conference, October 29–31, 2009, University of Konstanz, https://www.translating-society.de/conference/papers/2/.

[231] Mufti, "Zarina Hashmi and the Arts of Dispossession," 191-193.

[232] Goswami, *Producing India*, 5.

of migration and displacement by positioning belonging and home as anoriginary, in a practice of witnessing that asks viewers over and over again: what remains?

9/11 and Partition: Insurgent Ground

It was at around the time of September 11, while living in New York City, that Zarina made one of the most iconic representations of partition that exists—*Dividing Line* (2001, fig. 24). The black and white woodcut print consists of a scarred rectangular expanse cut diagonally by a meandering, jagged black line. This work draws two asynchronous, traumatic events together in an uncanny convergence—the partition of the Indian subcontinent and 9/11—as if the Indian-born, New York based artist's experience of living through the second made it possible for her to re-encounter the first, almost fifty-four years later.[233] Although partition is a subject that animates an entire body of literature and cinema, this is one of very few works of art to engage it without reference to either a human figure or a particular nation.[234] Rarer still, it is a representation of partition by a survivor.

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[233] There is a strange, recursive return to the figure of the "Muslim" as a racialized formation that also tethers these events together, interpolated as "Muslim terrorist" in the United States post-9/11, and the "Muslim invader" or "anti-national" in India from the 1990s onwards.

[234] In literature, representations exist that are not nationalist and that reflect the absurdity of suddenly belonging to a nation-state borne seemingly overnight, such as Saadat Hassan Manto's short story "Toba Tek Singh" and Qurratulain Hayder's novel *Aag Ka Darya* (River of Fire), to name only two. While Bollywood cinema is overwhelmingly nationalist in its representations, more nuanced films that foreground the plight of minorities left in each respective country include *Khamosh Pani/Silent Waters* (2003) and *Garm Hava* (1973).

FIGURE 24. ZARINA, *DIVIDING LINE* (2001)

Zarina condensed the history of partition into small gestures in *Dividing Line*. The work departs from the dominance of figurative representations by artists who take on the subject of partition by engaging with the aerial view.[235] Despite the oft-used reference of minimalism in writing on her work, Zarina's minimalism, her form of abstraction, lies somewhere on a gradient between pure abstraction and figuration. Zarina herself was puzzled by the use of Minimalism by feminist artists in describing her work: "They'd say my work is very abstract and very minimal. I didn't know what minimal was. I'd never heard the term because I didn't go to an art school."[236] Her abstract works reduce the language of the floor plan, or images drawn from memory, through recourse to geometry, although this binary is itself fraught and privileges a particular Orientalist and racial telos of "Western" art. As Zahid Chaudhary observes of Fazal Sheikh's aerial photographs in *Desert Bloom* (2011), "the abstraction of these works is not the kind of abstraction that can be easily opposed to the figural," a tension that Zarina's work shares, particularly in its use of orthographic projection, which represents three-dimensional objects in two dimensions—what is known as a bird's eye or aerial

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[235] These works include paintings by the Progressive Artists Group artists and others, including Akbar Padamsee, Krishen Khanna, and Tyeb Mehta, amongst others. Mehta's "diagonal series" also takes on the subject matter of partition but his paintings also challenge clear binaries of figurative and abstract representation. This series of richly colored paintings relies on a heavy use of the diagonal with "falling figures and fractured forms" whose form is attributed to his witnessing "Partition-era brutality on the streets of Mumbai" in his Bombay working-class neighborhood. See Arani Bose, "Tyeb Mehta (1925-2009)," *ArtAsiaPacific* (Sept/Oct 2009), http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/65/TyebMehta19252009. Other painters who also engage the subject albeit with a more figurative bent include: M.F. Husain, *Tale of Three Cities* (2008-11); Ranbir Kaleka, *Family—1* (1983); Pran Nath Mago, *Mourners* (1947); Jimmy Engineer, *The Last Burning Train of 1947* (2009); Satish Gujral, *Mourning en Masse* (1954), amongst others.

[236] Shirazi, "Feminism for Me Was About Equal Pay for Equal Work."

view.[237] Abstraction and figuration belong to a particular epistemology and theorization of history, from Greece through the Renaissance and then Euro-American postwar narratives, that places vision above all other senses and belies complex relationships between postwar modernist avant-garde's ties to fascism and the rise of American imperialism.[238] In Euro-American scholarship, abstraction emerges from Western modernity, adhering to a binary that Stuart Hall calls "the West and the Rest."[239] Scholars of global modernism, by contrast, demonstrate the innumerable iterations of abstraction that draw from multiple entangled genealogies. Following scholars in Black, indigenous, and postcolonial studies, I argue that Zarina's work is part of an episteme of abstraction that emerges not out of modernity but out of *colonial* modernity and its racialized logic that Western modernism forecloses.

Partition is one of the tragedies of the era of decolonization that is contemporaneous with the postwar era. It is marked by the simultaneity of independence from British rule and the partition of the Indian subcontinent into three discontiguous territories and two countries—West Pakistan, India, and East Pakistan—

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[237] In his essay on abstraction in Fazal Sheikh's aerial photographs of the Negev desert, Zahid Chaudhary argues against readings of abstraction as "pure form" that lie beyond "the concrete." Concrete, here is being juxtaposed with pure form, and, as I understand it, refers to the binary between abstraction and figuration. Although he is writing about photography, the observation is relevant here in relation to Zarina's work, which also engages with the aerial view. Chaudhary observes "the abstraction of these works is not the kind of abstraction that can be easily opposed to the figural or to the concrete. The images are abstract *and* figural, and they indicate world-historical forces *and* uniquely local histories." Zahid Chaudhary, "Desert Blooms," *October* 168 (Spring 2019): 94.

[238] See Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[239] Hall, "The West and the Rest."

which was coincident with cataclysmic violence across the northern and eastern regions, and smaller scale, episodic violence throughout the rest of the country.[240] Almost every family endured some traumatic loss, whether through direct experiences of bodily violence, loss of home, and displacement or indirect experiences that continue to structure everyday life—endless war and gender, caste, and religious violence.[241] Zarina's work reveals the uneven geographies and multiple temporalities of these postcolonial inheritances and refusals that are part of the afterlife of partition. Drawing from Saidiya Hartman's work on transatlantic slavery towards colonialism and Indian Ocean slavery in the subcontinent and its entanglement with what is called "communal violence," I argue that partition is also experienced and re-experienced through the endurance of its ethno-racialized violence, a repetition of the dividing line as an anoriginary cut—marking an excision of minorities—that is inversely mirrored and transmutes itself across the subcontinent. The artist's preoccupation with architectural

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[240] For more on Zarina's recollections of the experience, see Zarina and Burney, *Directions to My House*. Mehta, as cited earlier, witnessed violence in his neighborhood in Bombay related to partition, although the intensity of violence was greater across the north where it divided Punjab into two halves, and the east, where Bengal was also split, following a previous partition by the British Raj in 1905 that was part of their divide and rule policy.

[241] The loss sustained by families and individuals is still difficult to reckon with, although the work of many scholars, writers, and individuals to make sense and meaning of it continues. This includes scholarship on memory and gendered violence, and minority and caste violence, and museums such as The Partition Museum in Amritsar; the 1947 Partition Archive distributed on YouTube, in partnership with Stanford University; and the Citizens Archive of Pakistan in Karachi, as well as innumerable other projects, archives, and initiatives. See: Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar, *We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement,* trans. Wandana Sonalkar (Delhi: Zubaan, 2008); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Suvir Kaul, *Of Gardens and Graves: Kashmir, Poetry, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Jayshree P. Mangubhai, Emma Sydenham, and Aloysius Irudayam S.J., *A Foot In the Door: Dalit Women in Panchayati Raj In Gujarat and Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Zubaan Publishing, 2020); Om Prakash Valmiki, *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life,* trans. Arun Prahba Mukherjee (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

representations—floor plans and maps—is bound up in the peculiar relationship of drawing and cartography to the modern nation-state, and reconsiders the aerial view and cartography as tools of war, theft, and dispossession within a history of colonialism and postcolonial nationalism that Zarina's work engages and extends beyond. Zarina's anti-monumental work refuses the scale of the nation and the sanctity of cartographic representations.[242]

Manu Goswami tracks the production of a "bounded national space and economy" that hollowed out the secular modern project of the Indian nation-state. She argues: "a tension between [a] universalistic conception of national development and a particularist, specifically Hindu understanding of nationhood was built into Indian nationalism."[243] Unlike the nativist representation of India as Bharat Mata that create a new Hindu deity representing the territorial boundaries of the Indian nation, Zarina locates this contradiction of secular modernity and nationalist cartographic representation in her work. She subverts what Sumathi Ramaswamy calls "command cartography" of British colonial rule by representing the Indian home, particularly the zenana, or women's space, not as an architectural relic but as an alternate site of habitation to the nation-state, using modes of spatial representation that elide figurative

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[242] Saloni Mathur, "Partition and the Visual Arts: Reflections on Method," *Third Text* 31, nos. 2–3: "To Draw the Line: Partitions, Dissonance, Art – A Case for South Asia" (Fall 2017): 205–12.

[243] Goswami, *Producing India*, 5.

representations that index a religious body, offering us a feminist critique of and counter-narrative to colonial modernity.[244]

In *Dividing Line*, Zarina refigured the cartographic line drawn upon a map of the Indian subcontinent by Cyril Radcliffe, the architect of partition. The Radcliffe line, as it is known, cleaved through Punjab at one end and Bengal on the other, arbitrarily splitting both these regions in half and demarcating the boundaries of the newly independent nations of India and Pakistan. In this work, Zarina did not represent this "dividing line" as a figure by carving it out of the woodblock, which would have produced a black image cut by a white line. Instead she inverted the representation of figure and ground by gouging the ground out of the block itself, leaving a jagged, raised line as a remainder of the process of carving, a tribute to the tragedy of decolonization.

The title of this work refers to the way in which partition reconfigured the subcontinent through the structural violence of colonialism, embodied in the careless and catastrophic cartographic gesture of a line drawn hastily upon a two-dimensional map. This line uprooted at least 15 million people in one of the largest mass migrations in human history. People negotiated questions of citizenship and communal belonging on the ground against the line's abstraction of citizenship in new nation-states with new territorial boundaries. Yet *Dividing Line* also evokes the "figure of the border" as an

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[244] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation,* 112. For more on the zenana as a site of intervention with which to critique the gender politics of Indian nationalism, see Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

ongoing process that produces "both bridges and walls," as Sandro Mezzadra and Naoki Sakai write: "A border is not something already accomplished, something engraved in stone, so to say, but in constant motion and metamorphosis. It is rather in the register of action than of substance, rather a verb than a noun. It is a *poietic* act."[245] The artist did not name or otherwise identify the land on either side of her line, unlike a map, and instead registered the laborious process of carving *and* the resistance of the material of the woodblock itself, conveying a grounded embodiment in the poietic action from the ground over the disembodied, distant gaze of the aerial view. The rough-hewn marks visible in the positive space of *Dividing Line* conjure the hand of the artist and the Dremel tool with which she carved the block, as well as the materiality of the wood itself. The artist privileges a provisional temporality of the inscription of a border, akin to the process of separating one language from another, a practice of "bordering" that critiques the seemingly eternal borders of nation-states, and moves beyond the pure opticality of the floor plan or the aerial map.[246] The investment in conveying touch or hapticality through vision, as well as in visibilizing labor and temporality, is underscored by Zarina's investment in the degradation that time will wreck on fragile, organic materials such as the paper with which she works and that she

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[245] Sakai and Mezzadra, "Introduction," 10-11.

[246] Sakai and Mezzadra equate the process of separation or "translation" as "a process of inscribing a border" that is accompanied by a practice of "bordering." Ibid.,12.

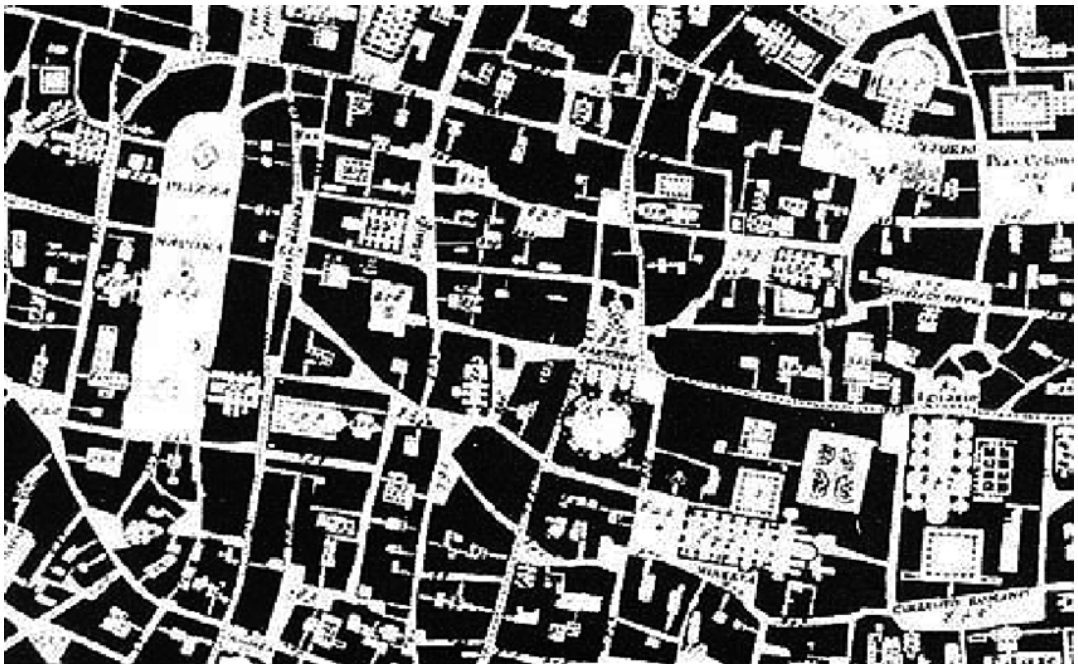

FIGURE 25. GIAMBATTISTA NOLLI, *PIANTA GRANDE DI ROMA/PLAN OF ROME* (1748)

so often likened to skin, emphasizing the relationship she draws between her work and the human body. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney define hapticality as:

> modernity's insurgent feel, its inherited caress, its skin talk, tongue touch, breath speech, hand laugh. This is the feel that no individual can stand, and no state abide…. Hapticality, the touch of the undercommons, the interiority of sentiment, the feel that what is to come is here. Hapticality, the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you, this feel of the shipped is not regulated, at least not successfully, by a state, a religion, a people, an empire, a piece of lands, a totem.[247]

Rizvana Bradley extends our understanding of the haptic as "an explicitly minoritarian aesthetic and political formulation—a figuration of alterity that simultaneously marks the overlap of and break between thought and feeling."[248] Zarina's work demonstrates

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[247] Moten and Harney, *The Undercommons*, 98.

[248] Rizvana Bradley, "Introduction: Other Sensualities," *Women and Performance* 24, no. 2-3, "The Haptic: Textures of Performance" (January 2015), https://www.womenandperformance.org/ampersand/rizvana-bradley-1.

this overlap and break between thought and feeling in the way she extends architectural representation into the realm of the haptic and in her investment in an insurgent ground.

Zarina's work bears less in common with two-dimensional cartographic lines and mapmaking's correlation to property ownership and colonial surveys than it does to conceptual and sculptural understandings of space and ground, in which ownership, or sovereignty, does not define either home or national belonging. Her work recalls the play with architectural figure-ground conventions, such as that of Giambattista Nolli's *Pianta Grande di Roma* (1748, fig. 25).[249] Nolli's great innovation in his map of Rome was not simply that he represented the city through more accurate techniques of measurement but that he rendered every publicly habitable space of the city visually accessible through his inversion of the figure-ground, in which black poché is used for blocks, or "figure," and unbuilt space, or "ground," is left white. While the Bufalini map that precedes his also uses this technique, blackening all buildings and blocks, while keeping the streets and exterior public squares white, Nolli's map shifts its conventions to *include* as ground (white) public spaces in Rome that are interiorized, which resulted in a representation of the city in which every accessible open space—from "unbuilt" sidewalks and streets to the interior architecture of buildings such as St. Peter's Basilica and the Pantheon—was rendered visually accessible and hence penetrable. Politically, I

[249] While Nolli's map was based on the first survey of Rome by Leonardo Bufalini from 1551, Nolli introduced two novel strategies: a re-orientation of the map to the compass's true North instead of eastward, and a novel use of the figure-ground technique.

read this as undermining private property and enclosure, as the envelope of a building reads as a delineation of privacy in Buffalini's map but not in Nolli's. I draw this novel use of Nolli's figure-ground techniques of representation alongside Zarina's in *Dividing Line,* in which she utilized the same figure-ground technique. Her jagged line, rendered in black poché, reads as an interruption, an attempt at enclosure, like the exterior walls of the buildings in Nolli's map, while the land on either side is rendered white like his civic spaces—the ground here is also penetrable and hence accessible if the figure of the border was removed. Nolli's map of Rome produced a new image of the city, and Zarina's work, too, renders the partition of the subcontinent in a way that was unimaginable prior, activating the ground's insurgent potentiality which pulses through the marks on either side of this and every other dividing line. Here, the border is rendered a form of containment in constant threat of annihilation by a swell of movement that may swallow the figure and return the ground to itself, undivided, and whole. The border in Zarina's work exceeds its cartographic representations and its historical context by revealing the material processes through which such abstractions are translated, extending this line from the land to our bodies, languages, and sense of national belonging.

Zarina engaged architectural and aerial technologies of vision that are the products of the "distanced" technologies of vision, historically associated with colonial modernity, that are used as weapons of surveillance, domination, and war, while also

thinking beyond them.[250] In *Dividing Line*, she took the tools of colonial modernity and held a space between imperial violence and the mediation of images by engaging the aerial view while foregrounding processes of labor and materiality instead of the detached, omniscient gaze.[251] Zarina returned the view "from above" back to the ground, a critique of what Achille Mbembe describes as colonialism's "vertical sovereignty" with its "separation of the airspace from the ground."[252]

Both *Dividing Line* and *Home is a Foreign Place* are similarly shaped by forces of displacement and migration resulting from partition. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson observe that the modern episteme of the border has proliferated in contemporary globalization and that it transforms the nation-state as well as concepts such as citizenship and sovereignty.[253] As if in response, Zarina's work offers us the feminized space of domesticity and the reproductive labor of spatial practices of everyday life as constitutive of home and dwelling over sovereignty and citizenship

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[250] For more on photography, technology, and vision in Western modernity, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: Vision and Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

[251] The aerial gaze is part of the language and logic of the drone-strikes that were used by the United States in the response to the attack on the World Trade Center—"high precision" "surgical strikes" that had a "low human cost." This narrative has been challenged by human rights lawyers and residents who have been subject to American strikes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, and Yemen. See International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School and Global Justice Clinic at NYU School of Law, "Living Under Drones: Death, Injury and Trauma to Civilians from the US Drone Practices in Pakistan," September 2012, https://www-cdn.law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Stanford-NYU-Living-Under-Drones.pdf.

[252] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 28. Mbembe is engaging with Eyal Weizman, "Introduction to The Politics of Verticality," *openDemocracy,* April 23, 2002, , https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article_801jsp/.

[253] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

within a nation-state. Belonging is performative and home is made and remade, in a perpetually recursive condition of migration and displacement for minoritarian subjects for whom, to draw from a title by the artist, home *is* a foreign place.

Chapter 2. Nasreen Mohamedi: Photographic Portals and Indian Ocean Itineraries

Technologies of Extraction / Exercises in Abstraction

> Nasreen was not born in the desert but she knew and loved the deserts of Arabia. The desert is a lack of origins, a lack of engendering, a natal desertion, Cixous says. The infant awakens to perfect absence.
> —Geeta Kapur[254]

> The shadow came + stood in its place like yesterday
> —Nasreen Mohamedi[255]

Nasreen Mohamedi reputedly never exhibited her photographs during her lifetime.[256] This incorrect assumption underlies all writing on the artist and every exhibition of her work. While it holds true that some of her practice, such as her diaries, were not meant for public display, Mohamedi *did* in fact exhibit her photographs—not in India but in Bahrain. In one of two solo shows she had at The British Council in Manama, Mohamedi showed a series of her abstract photographs alongside her paintings.[257] If Zarina introduces the concept of an Indian diasporic subject in the post-independence era, at a time when art writing largely excluded women and Indian artists living outside India's territorial boundaries, Mohamedi troubles the stability of

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[254] Kapur, "Elegy for an Unclaimed Beloved," 12.

[255] Mohamedi's diary entry from March, 1981.

[256] Roobina Karode writes: "In any event, her photographs were never exhibited in her lifetime." Roobina Karode, *Nasreen Mohamedi: Waiting Is a Part of Intense Living*, 36. For more writing on Mohmaedi see: Brinda Kumar, "The Elegant Complexity of Nasreen Mohamedi," *Marg* 68, no. 1 (September-December 2016): 19; Emilia Terracciano, "Fugitive Lines: Nasreen Mohamedi 1960-75," *Art Journal* 73, no. 1 (July 10, 2014): 45-59; Emilia Terracciano, *Art and Emergency: Modernism in 20th Century India* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Hemant Sareen, "Break the Cycle of Seeing: Indian Minimalism," *Art Asia Pacific* 75 (September/October 2011): 95-103.

[257] Ahmed Kassim al-Sunni, "Exhibition Review," 1966 and 1969. Archive of Gulam Mohammed Sheikh.

its territorial geographies as an Indian subject circulating along Indian Ocean networks.[258]

One factor that may have contributed to the oversight regarding Mohamedi having actually exhibited her photographs in her lifetime is that writing on the artist solely situates her within the territorial framework of the Indian nation-state, and did not look beyond India. I situate Mohamedi instead as part of India and the Indian Ocean network, within which she, her family, and their fortunes, circulated.[259]

A corollary of thinking of Mohamedi as purely an "Indian artist" has been the overdetermination of the "desert" that influenced Mohamedi's work. The desert is expressed through Orientalist literary tropes of an uninhabited, non-place. What is conflated under the moniker desert, in writing and exhibitions on Mohamedi's photographs, is a lack of engagement with sites beyond India in analyses of Mohamedi's photographs. The very specific locations of the changing landscapes of port cities are overlooked or misidentified. One image of the ruins of a thick wall in Bahrain is misattributed as Rajasthan, and a photograph of Kuwait is commonly

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[258] Krishna Reddy and S.H. Reza are two exceptions, the former lived in Paris and then New York, and the latter mostly in Paris. Raza was one of the founders of the Bombay Progressives, whereas Reddy was a student at Santiniketan who left India to study in Italy and then France.

[259] Nasreen's father began a shop in Manama, Bahrain called "Ashraf's" which sold household goods and later photographic equipment. It was one of the first stores to import foreign goods at a large scale, and was well known by residents for bringing consumer goods—cameras, watches, kitchen equipment, electronics from Japan—otherwise unavailable in the local market from the 1950s through the 70s, at which time their business boomed. By the 1980s, they become one of many such shops but remained successful businessmen. The store exists to this day and retains it name although the Mohamedi family sold it to another family that retains the shop's name. Conversation with Dr. Ahmed al-Dailami, London, 22 July 2018 and 21 September 2020.

misidentified as Bahrain.[260] Mohamedi's photographs of the "desert" include Rajasthan, in India, and Kuwait and Bahrain (fig. 26), which were undergoing rapid transformations of their built environment in the 1960s and '70s when Mohamedi was migrating along these Indian Ocean routes—from Bombay to Manama and Kuwait City—and taking photographs. Tracing Mohamedi's photographs to their actual locations alters our reading of both their content and what the artist was witnessing and documenting. Mohamedi trained her eye on architecture and a radically changing built environment in the Indian Ocean region during the transition from British colonial rule to post-colonial independence in all three places—India, Kuwait, and Bahrain—which lends a political poignancy to her work, beyond the formalism or mysticism that is often ascribed to the artist and the images.

Photography, I will argue, was a fundamental part of Mohamedi's practice in the mid-1960s that provided her with a transitional mode of working, through which she segued from painting to drawing, exclusively. I trace this through early experimental photographs that approximate drawings, as well as Mohamedi's multi-media paintings from the late 1960s, when she began incorporating cut-outs from photographs that she collaged atop her paintings, a mode of working that Mohamedi then adapted to the darkroom. I loosely organize Mohamedi's photographs into modes of abstract

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[260] Mohamedi's 2016 Met Breuer show misattributed the location of the Kuwait Water Tower photographs Mohamedi took as Bahrain, for example. The distinctive Kuwait Water Towers are well known, designed by the Swedish engineering firm VBB; the project received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1980. "Untitled," museum object label, *Nasreen Mohamedi*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, March 18–June 5, 2016.

FIGURE 26. NASREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (DATE UNKNOWN)

photography, photograms, and documentary images. Her darkroom experiments combine the unusual use of objects such as string to dodge images, and strips of paper

to block out or frame images.[261] This form of what I will call Mohamedi's photo-collage emphasizes hapticity and aleatory experiments.

Beginning with a work in her exhibition at the British Council in Manama, I contend that many of Mohamedi's photographs of the desert, produced using experimental darkroom techniques, are documents of witness to the rapid transformation of architecture and the built environment in India and across the Indian Ocean through the 1960s. I assert that the artist's reliance on chance and experimentation in the darkroom offers us a delicate counterpoint to the extractive technologies of mining and oil that transformed the landscapes she photographed. Unlike Indian documentary photographers who captured the transformations that independence and modernization wrought on people's lives, Mohamedi's numinous photographs, bereft of individuals, are portals to a space and time beyond modernism and modernization that render these images through a particular "feminine" sensibility.

Bombay Abstraction

Mohamedi was born in Karachi in 1937 in what was then British India, and in 1944 her family migrated to Bombay after the death of her mother.[262] It is in Bombay

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[261] A photogram is a photograph made without a camera, produced by laying objects on photosensitive paper and exposing the paper to light. Mohamedi's interest in the techniques of photograms echo those of László Moholy-Nagy, the Hungarian born Bauhaus artist who coined the term, and began experimenting with them with his wife Lucia Schulz from 1922 until 1929—before their divorce and despite these early works being credited only to Moholy-Nagy. Man Ray, a contemporary of Moholy-Nagy, who was born in America but lived in Paris, also conducted extensive experiments with photograms and named them "rayographs."

[262] While the city's official name was changed from Bombay to Mumbai after Shiv Sena, the far right Hindu political party, came to power in 1995 to Mumbai, I will refer to the city as Bombay.

that the artist and her family experienced partition, quite unlike the experience of her colleague Zarina, and her family, in the north. While Bombay was not without instances of violence, they were sporadic; Bombay did not experience anything near the scale of population transfer, upheaval, and cataclysmic violence that spread across the Punjab. Mohamedi then spent the rest of her life moving between port cities along the Indian Ocean—Karachi, Bombay, Kihim, Kuwait City, and Manama—with detours in London in the mid-'50s for her studies at Central St. Martins, two years in Paris on a French Government Scholarship in the '60s, a few years in Delhi in the early '70s, and extensive time in Baroda, where she taught in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Baroda from 1972 through 1988.[263] There was also a trip to New York in the 1980s, where she stayed with Zarina, whom she met in Delhi through Jeram Patel in the early 1970s, and where she also met with Carl Andre, who had participated in the Second Indian Triennale in Delhi in 1971, and whose wife Ana Mendieta was a close friend of Zarina's.[264] Mohamedi also traveled to Western Europe, Turkey, and Iran, as well as numerous trips taken within India—most notably, based on her photographs, to

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[263] The Mohamedi family had businesses across the Indian Ocean, as they belong to a mercantile family. The family had businesses in Kuwait, Bahrain, Bombay, and Karachi. For work on the Indian diaspora in Dubai, see Neha Vora, *Impossible Citizens: Dubai's Indian Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

[264] Mohamedi and Zarina showed work together in the Third Indian Triennale in 1975. This was all prior to the death of Mendieta and the trial in which her husband, Carl Andre, was accused and acquitted of her murder. Coco Fusco has written that Mendieta's death has and should not overshadow her practice. See: Coco Fusco, "Traces of Ana Mendieta, 1988-1993," in *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion In The Americas* (The New Press: New York City, 1995): 121-125.

Rajasthan and Fatehpur Sikri.[265] Mohamedi's family is part of pre-modern social and economic networks of the Indian Ocean that lay beyond juridical categories of territorial nationalism. Despite the restrictions on mobility placed by the modern nation-state's policing of national boundaries, these networks persist into the modern period.

Critically engaging with Mohamedi's photographs and tracing the specific places that Mohamedi worked in, and photographed, underscores the circulation networks of trade, pilgrimage, and migration of these extant pre-modern Indian Ocean itineraries. The artist's family was Suleimani Bohra, as was M.F. Husain—an Ismaili Shia sect that is part of what Nile Green calls Bombay's 19th century "oceanic economy of Muslim religious exchange" that "placed Bombay at the centre of the newly industrialized ocean marketplace, whereas it had scarcely even featured in the pre-industrialized religious economy of the period before the mid-nineteenth century."[266] This time period is commensurate with the introduction of photographic technology to Bombay, with the advent of photography in the 1850s and the screening of the first films in the country—only a year after they were screened in Western Europe, the United States, and South

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[265] Mohamedi traveled with M.F. Husain to Rajasthan in 1964, where he was shooting his first film *Through the Eyes of a Painter,* and in the early 1970s to Fatehpur Sikri with Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, and P.D. Dhumal. Archive of Gulam Mohammed Sheikh.

[266] Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Green observes that "Bombay's economic, demographic and more broadly industrial expansion after 1840 enabled the creation of a new kind of religious economy that was more pluralistic, competitive and productive than its pre-industrial predecessors." Ibid, 239-40. For more on Bombay's enchanted modernity and Bohra trading and labor communities see ibid., 170-17.

America—by the Lumière Brothers in 1897, at the still-standing Watson Hotel in Bombay's Kala Godha.[267]

The strong diagonals and the tangled bodies in Tyeb Mehta's paintings allude to a traumatic murder the artist witnessed during partition.[268] Mehta was affiliated with the Bombay Progressive Artists Group (PAG), which was founded in 1947 by six artists —K.H. Ara, S.H. Raza, M.F. Hussain, F.N. Souza, H.A. Gade and S.K. Bakre. The PAG was less a formal movement than a social affiliation; PAG artists were interested in creating novel aesthetic forms for the newly independent nation, "a new art for a new India" influenced by postwar and post-independence modernist movements across the world, and against the Bombay Art Society, infamous for its elitism and lack of accountability to its purported public. In their manifesto, the PAG artists expressed an antagonism to British art academicism and the traditionalism of the Bengal School and an investment in social progress, in "bridging the widening gulf between artists and the people."[269] Many of its members were recent graduates of Bombay's Sir J.J. School of Art, and had experienced the period of transition from pre- to and post-independence as students, such as Souza who actively organized student protests demanding the

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[267] The buildings, constructed between 1860-1863, is the oldest cast iron building in India constructed of pre-fab material imported from England to Bombay.

[268] Tyeb Mehta and Akbar Padamsee both recalled the horrors of witnessing violence around partition, with Padamsee recalling that he was injured in 1944 after the explosion of a British cargo ship decimated the port and the nearby area. Mehta purportedly witnessed a murder in his neighborhood in Bombay. Akbar Padamsee in conversation with the author, Bombay, November 2018.

[269] Bombay Progressive Artists Group, Statement in Exhibition Catalogue, Bombay Art Salon, 7 July 1948, Asia Art Archive.

replacement of the white, British head master of the School with an Indian, as well as the post-independence shift in faculty, curriculum and pedagogy—or as workers, such as M.F. Husain who painted movie signboards.[270] The PAG were aware of art collectives from the pre-independence period such as the Young Turks, founded in Bombay in 1939, on the heels of Amrita Sher-Gil wining the Bombay Art Society's Gold Medal in 1937, which provoked a heated debate in Bombay newspapers about the Society and the status of academic realism versus modern styles of painting.[271] There was also the Calcutta Group of 1943 and the collective Karusangha founded in Santiniketan in 1930.[272]

The PAG's first members were all men of different classes from various communities: M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, F.N. Souza, K.H. Ara, H.A. Gade, and S.K. Bakre. As Souza and Raza received scholarships to Paris and left Bombay, other members were invited to join the group such as Tyeb Mehta, Vasudeo S. Gaitonde, Mohan Samant and Krishen Khanna, the recent transplant from Delhi. There was one woman nominated who spent a short time affiliated with the group, Bhanu Rajopadhye Athaiya, who participated in a 1953 show at the Jehangir Art Gallery, after which she left the art world

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[270] Movie signboards or cinema hoardings are the equivalent of painted billboards. In the Annual Report of the J.J. School Bombay, S.H. Raza and V.S. Gaitonde were mentioned for the awards they received abroad in 1947. Padamsee's award is also mentioned. Annual Report, J.J. School Bombay, Archives of Sir J.J. School of Art, 1948.

[271] The Young Turks consisted of the artists P.T. Reddy, A.A. Majid, Bhopale, Clement Baptista, and M.Y. Kulkarni, founded in Bombay in 1939-40.

[272] See Bittner and Rhomberg ed., *Bauhaus in Calcutta*.

for fashion and costume design.[273] While the Progressives' affiliation was short-lived (they disbanded in 1956), they created a strong network of affiliations that extended through Bombay and beyond, to Delhi, Baroda, as well as across the world, in Paris and London, where many subsequently lived or studied, as well as New York, where Khanna, Gaitonde, and Tyeb Mehta, amongst others, held Rockefeller Foundation grants in the mid to late 1960s. Akbar Padamsee, a student at the J.J. School who was friends with the Progressives, was brought to Paris by Raza in 1951. In Paris, Padamsee was awarded a prize for a painting in a competition judged by Andre Breton and remained in the city before returning to Bombay, where he was asked to guest lecture at his alma mater by his teacher S.B. Palsikar. Padamsee lectured on Paul Klee at the School, a lecture that Gaitonde attended as he was then teaching at his alma matter. Klee influenced Gaitonde, which is evident in Gaitonde's paintings from the early 1950s, with their color palette and delicate, geometric line work. This preceded a transition in the artist's work in the early 1960s when he began experimenting with tools such as rollers and palette knives to create his novel, non-objective oil paintings that then came to define his career.

Nasreen Mohamedi is part of this lineage of what I call "Bombay abstraction." Bombay abstraction is borne out of the influence of the anti-colonial art movements

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[273] Bhanu Rajopadhye Athaiya, a former student of Gaitonde's at the J.J. School, went on to become a costume designer of great acclaim. See: *The Progressive Revolution: Modern Art for a New India,* curated by Dr. Zehra Jumabhoy and Boon Hui Tan, Asia Society Museum, New York City, September 14–January 20, 2019.

prior to partition, and their yearning for modern forms breaking with elitist academicism, a yearning that was echoed by the J.J. School artists and teachers. Shankar Palsikar, an influential teacher to all the J.J. School of Art Progressive Artists, was interested in Sanskrit epics and Rajput miniature, and was a founding member of the Bombay Group which formed in 1956, after the dissolution of the PAG, which comprised of many of his students.[274] Palsikar was a teacher of S.H. Raza, Akbar Padamsee, Tyeb Mehta and V.S. Gaitonde, amongst others who studied at J.J. School prior to partition, and he remained influential at the school as the Dean after independence.[275] All of Mohamedi's predecessors in Bombay refused the chromophobia of the postwar West, and were drawn to artists such as Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, Theosophists for whom color was imbricated within geometry and an

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[274] See Prabhakar Kolte, S*hankar Palsikar (1916-1984)—"Centenary Year of the Artist's Birth,"* exhibition catalogue (Mumbai: National Gallery of Modern Art Mumbai, 2017).

[275] In terms of pedagogy at the J.J. School, Palsikar was deeply influential on his students, such as Gaitonde and Padamsee. There is a lineage of Bombay based abstraction that draws from the study of Sanskrit texts, hieroglyphics, and Marathi language that begins with Palsikar and extends onwards to artists such as Prabhakar Kolte. The question of whether this lineage is exclusive of Maharashtran artists and Marathi speakers in historical writing and art criticism is an interesting one. Manohar Mhatre in conversation with the author, Bombay, July 2017.

intrinsic part of forms.[276] These artists painted their canvases in lush tones and felt, as the photographer Raghubir Singh (1942-1999) observed, that "to see India monochromatically, is to miss it altogether."[277] These artists also drew from their own range of modern and indigenous references, such as Sanskrit epics, Tantric art, Chinese scroll painting, Japanese Zen Buddhism, Mughal and Rajput miniature painting, Kufic calligraphy, Urdu poetry, Hindustani music, avant-garde Western movements as well as photography and film, which came to British India on the heels of its introduction in Western Europe and North America. Nasreen Mohamedi is part of this legacy of Bombay abstraction, the embrace of new forms and new media by the modernists in the newly independent nation-state.[278] What distinguishes Mohamedi from her

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[276] Jagdith Swaminathan (1928-1994) was also a proponent of this idea "colour -geometry" and was influenced by Tantric aesthetics and the work of Paul Klee. J. Swaminathan, "Colour-Geometry," and "The Cube and the Rectangle," *Lalit Kala Contemporary* 40—Special Issue on J. Swaminathan (1995): 21-22; 25-26. On Swaminathan's geometric abstraction, Kapur observes, "The paintings aimed, and in some cases arrived, beyond the purely pictorial: the picture plane became an environment, a space for meditation. Here he aligned himself with Tantra art, not historically or religiously but pictorially." Geeta Kapur, "Reaching out to the part," *Lalit Kala Contemporary* 40—Special Issue on J. Swaminathan (1995): 12. Despite Kapur's writing, Swaminathan in his own words: "The arrangement of geometric forms generates memory associations whose roots are in the racial, collective psyche. Thus a triangle placed on top of a rectangle tangentially evokes the thought of a *temple* and the upward thrust of the arrangement suggests erotic implications." (italics added) Swaminathan continues to say that the new art he is advocating for in independent India, against the modern movement in the West, must reject all traditionalism, yet he subconsciously locates "traditional concepts" within Tantric aesthetics and only cites Sanskrit epics (as well as what he describes as "folk" and "tribal" art). Swaminathan, "Colour-Geometry," and "The Cube and the Rectangle," 22, 26. While interest in Tantric aesthetics is in no way itself problematic nor Hindu supremacist, in retrospect, key modernists' excision of the influence of Mughal, Awhadi, Deccan, and Indian Ocean aesthetics culminates in the conflation of the Indian nation with Hinduism.

[277] Raghubir Singh interview with *Time Magazine*, quoted in "Photojournalist Raghubir Singh Dies at Age 56," *Washington Post*, April 25, 1999, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1999/04/25/photojournalist-raghubir-singh-dies-at-age-56/576511d8-2707-4e42-bae3-113ad08876c8/.

[278] I argue that Mohamedi is a part of this lineage of Bombay abstraction that stretches back to pre-independence Palsikar and onwards to Prabhakar Kolte, and therefore at odds with the Baroda School and its emphasis on figural representation and folk art.

FIGURE 27. PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, PHOTOGRAPH OF NASREEN MOHAMEDI AT HER STUDIO IN THE BHULABHAI INSTITUTE, BOMBAY (CA. LATE 1950S)

predecessors in Bombay, and what I will explore here in more depth, is her abandonment of painting in favor of black and white ink drawings and experimental photographs, which departed from the dominant mode of Indian documentary photography of the time.

From Collage to Photomontage: Bhulabhai Institute

Bombay and its social life in the 1960s are central to Mohamedi's development as a painter, as well as her transition away from painting to photography and drawing. From the 1950s through the mid-1960s, Mohamedi was devoted to painting. The young

artist grew up in Bombay, with its reputable Sir J.J. School of Art and was exposed by her family to both art and artists in her youth.[279] After returning to Bombay in 1957, after receiving her BFA from Central St. Martins in London, Mohamedi, then only twenty years old, was given a studio at the Bhulabhai Desai Memorial Institute (fig. 27) alongside artists decades senior to her, such as V.S. Gaitonde, M.F. Husain and Dashrat Patel, who had all been working at the Institute since the mid-1950s.[280] Bhulabhai was on a private property on Warden Road in South Bombay; one of the two bungalows on the property was converted by congressman Desai's daughter-in-law into an art institute.[281] Shanta Gokhale recalled:

> It was a sprawling ground-plus-one bungalow with a big garden where sculptures and ceramic works were kept. Studio space was given to artists like Gaitonde, Nalini Malani, Nasreen Mohamedi, Ambalal, Tyeb Mehta, and M.F. Husain at RS. 1 per month. Ebrahim Alkazi ran his Theater Unit from an office here, Vijaya Mehta and Satyadev

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[279] The Sir J.J. School of Art was founded in 1857; the only schools that were older were the Madras School of Art, founded in 1850, and the Government College of Art and Craft in Calcutta, founded in 1854. The Mayo School in Lahore was founded the latest, in 1875.

[280] Shanta Gokhale's compilation of oral histories of artists who were part of the Bhulabhai Desai Memorial Institute, *The Scenes We Made: An Oral History of Experimental Theatre in Mumbai,* focuses on experimental theater and the 1960s. As a result it does not mention when Bhulabhai began giving artists studios, but through the histories and recollections it seems that Gaitonde, Husain, and Patel were there at the earliest in the mid-1950s. In 1956, Shyam Benegal saw a workshop led by Martha Graham and noted that artists were then already working in the studios, Patel began working at Ahmedabad's National Institute of Design (NID) in 1961. See Shanta Gokhale, *The Scenes We Made: An Oral History of Experimental Theatre in Mumbai* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2015). The TIFR Art Collection includes an untitled painting of Patel's that is dated 1962, which is an abstract work in earth tones with two lightly painted white cubic shapes almost like light plaster work made with wide brushes, on a very flat surface. See Mortimer Chatterjee and Tara Lal, *The TIFR Art Collection* (Mumbai: Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, 2010):115.

[281] Gokhale, *The Scenes We Made*, 3.

> Dubey rehearsed their plays here and Ravi Shankar established his music school, Kinnara, here in 1962.

Bhulabhai, as it was referred to short hand, was an art and theater hub in the 1960s, a "magical place" for artists, experimental Marathi and Hindi theater, film screenings of Indian cinema and International films, poetry readings and music recitals.[282] It was an interdisciplinary, alternative space before these words were bandied about in art historical discourse, and provided a studio space to artists in close proximity with peers working in different fields, with whom they could easily engage in conversations, by virtue of proximity and chance, in a loosely structured space that did not place demands on artistic output.[283] In the actor Gerson da Cunha's words, "Today, I see spaces where you can perform but I don't see spaces where you can meet as we did at the Bhulabhai Institute."[284] The actor Alyque Padamsee, Akbar Padamsee's elder brother, recalled the architectural layout and collaborative energy of the space:

> There was one upper level and one lower level. The lower space was not very well-designed…. But once you got to the next level where the terrace was, you felt free as a bird…. Akbar (Padamsee) and (M.F.) Husain were a part of the painters' group. And we were the theatre people. But there was a lot of intermingling and that was the beauty of the Bhulabhai Institute. It was a place where artists of different languages in theatre, of

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[282] Ibid., 3-4.

[283] Alyque Padamsee observed: "The Bhulabhai Desai wasn't very structured like the NCPA is today. You just went to Solibhai for anything you wanted…. He would just say 'The space is free on so and so day, come and use it.' It was very bohemian. But at the same time, the work was very dedicated and disciplined." Ibid., 30.

[284] Ibid.

different schools of painting, poetry came together…. I remember even Akbar and Husain organized some informal workshops of sorts. Not the kind where you'd have to sign here and pay there but the sort where you said, 'Okay let's meet tomorrow evening and talk about art.' There was always a kind of very pleasant gadbad going on there. Conversations, rivalries, controversies…that was the beauty of Bhulabhai.[285]

During Mohamedi's time at Bhulabhai, she was mentored by V.S. Gaitonde, and forged long-lasting relationships with other artists at the Institute.[286] Years later, Mohamedi accompanied Husain on a trip to Rajasthan, where he shot his film *Through The Eyes of a Painter* (1967), worked in the photography darkroom of Padamsee's Vision Exchange Workshop (1969-1972) in Bombay, and visited Patel in Ahmedabad when he was director of NID. In 1959, Mohamedi met Gaitonde due to her proximity to the studio of fellow artist Prafulla Dahanukar, a student of Gaitonde's from the J.J. School who offered her former Professor her studio to share. Gaitonde painted in Dahanukar's studio, which was next to Mohamedi's and separated by thin walls that the filmmaker Shyam Benegal described as "cubicles where most of the great artists of the second half

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[285] Shyam Benegal also recalled visiting Bhulabhai for a workshop with the American dancer Martha Graham, who was performing in 1956 at the Birla Matoshree Sabagriha, during the politically tense battle for the inclusion of Bombay in Maharashtra. The city was under curfew, trains were held at the station, violence occurred throughout the city, and though Benegal missed the performance, he was able to reach Bhulabhai to see her workshop. Ibid., 32-33.

[286] Gaitonde, like Mohamedi, was highly invested in form, process, the everyday and repetition in his work. He was using his "lift-off" painting technique, had shifted to vertical canvases, and was emphasizing horizontality, creating a tension between them, akin to scrolls, but also drawing from Abstract Expressionism, Palsikar, and colors that were decidedly different from someone like Rothko's work (whose studio he visited with Khanna when they were in New York). Gaitonde was also an avid movie goer, and with the dark of the room and the fixation on the screen, one cannot help but think if these are also the cuts of the film reel, the horizontality of celluloid that flickers across the screen, frozen for a moment in time. Krishen Khanna in conversation with the author, Delhi, January 2017.

of the twentieth century had their studios."[287] On one trip from Paris that year, Dahanukar brought back with her a paint roller she had purchased.[288] The roller captivated Gaitonde so much that he had copies made by a local artisan, at least one of which he gave to Mohamedi. Sandhini Poddar locates the end of Gaitonde's work with watercolor and pastels on paper to 1959, after which he shifts to a monochromatic palette in ink from 1961 onwards, and to using the roller and palette knives in his oil on canvas works.[289]

There is an uncanny resemblance between the non-objective works of Mohamedi with Gaitonde's during this time she spent at the Bhulabhai. Gaitonde himself was influenced by non-western abstraction, as he was by Klee—for example, postwar Japanese ink and calligraphic paintings which, like the tansaekhwa movement in Korea, refused the delineations between Eastern ink and watercolor painting and Western oil and gestural painting.[290] These distinctions, Joan Kee observes,

> included the segregation of oil from ink painting, a division that was brought into play during Japan's occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945, the period when most tansaekhwa artists were born. Also crucial was the distinction between legibility and

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[287] "Gaitonde had a studio, M.F. Husain and a studio, Mohan Samant had a studio. And there was a whole lot of space given to theatre for classes, workshops, rehearsals…. And the terrace of Bhulabhai was the theater." Gokhale, *The Scenes We Made*, 33.

[288] Manohar Mhatre in conversation the author, Bombay, July 2017.

[289] Sandhini Poddar, *V.S. Gaitonde: Painting as Process, Painting as Life* (New York: Prestel, 2014): 25.

[290] These postwar Japanese artists included Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop, active from 1951–1957) in Tokyo, and in Osaka, Gutai Bijyutsu Kyokai (Gutai Art Association, active from 1954–1972), an artists association that began with fifteen artists, with core member, painter Jiro Yoshihara.

> illegibility, a divide with critical implications during the authoritarian rule of Park Chung-hee, the deeply controversial army general who ruled South Korea for almost twenty years, from 1961 to 1979.[291]

The horizontality and spareness of Mohamedi's watercolor paintings and the flatness of her oils on canvas demonstrate her use of the roller, and a larger influence of Gaitonde as a mentor, prior to 1961 her departure to Paris on a French Government scholarship.

Gaitonde's early works from the 1950s demonstrate his indebtedness to the flatness and representational techniques of Indian miniature, East Asian painting, and the Swiss-German born Bauhaus artist Paul Klee. "The early figurative style that Gaitonde adopted during his time at the Sir J.J. School of Arts was of a kind," Mort Chatterjee observes, "popular amongst other artists such as B. Prabha who were aware of the similarities between Indian miniature school tradition and the work of 20th-century European artists such as John Miro and Paul Klee."[292] After graduating from the J.J. School, Gaitonde was a fellow and taught at the school. He had studied under Jagannath M. Ahivasi and Shankar Palsikar, both of whom were interested in Sanskrit devotional epics, and "Indian miniatures," although Palsikar taught only Rajput miniatures as opposed to Mughal miniatures—a distinction that belies a political sentiment regarding indigeneity in Maharashtra that was slowly emerging in Bombay's cultural spheres from the debates about including Bombay in Maharashtra from 1956

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[291] Kee, *Contemporary Korean Art*, 2.

[292] Mortimer Chatterjee and Tara Lal, *The TIFR Art Collection* (Mumbai: Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, 2010): 94.

onwards. Casting a retrospective gaze on this period of post-independence pedagogy at the J.J. School, it becomes clear that both Palsikar and Ahivasi were invested in a Maharashtran identity whose language, writing, and visual iconography came to be distinguished from that of Bombay's other inhabitants, such as Indian ocean mercantile and labour classes.

Scholarship on Mohamedi never connects her work to Bombay's schools of abstraction, despite its deep and myriad influences on her. Gaitonde, like Mohamedi, was not Maharashtran, but born to Goan parents in Maharashtra. He grew up in a working class family living in Bombay's chawls. The young man had a strained relationship with his father who did not encourage his son's artistic inclinations. It is remarkable that so many of the Bombay Progressives were from minority groups within Maharashtra, whereas the Bombay Group that formed after the PAG dissolved in 1956, which included Palsikar, marked a shift in subjectivity with all Marathi speakers and no minority artists.[293] It is Gaitonde who I argue links Mohamedi to the inheritance of Bombay abstraction, both as Bombaywallahs and non-Maharashtrans. Gaitonde's interest in non-objective art, in postwar East Asian and Western abstraction, as well as both Rajput and Mughal miniature—in which the image refuses a fidelity to a single perspective, and instead represents multiple-temporalities that allow for different

[293] The artists in the Bombay Group, which was founded in 1956, included Shankar Palsikar, K.K. Hebbar, K.H. Ara, Shiavax Chavda, D.G. Kulkarni, Laxman Pai, Har Krishnan Lall, and Baburao Sadwelkar. I do not know the different caste affiliation of the artists but surmise that they were all Hindu.

points of access for the viewer—influenced the young Mohamedi who combined them, while drawing from her own influences and inheritances.

Many of Gaitonde's figurative watercolors on paper from the early 1950s depict women in traditional dress drawn from representations of religious scenes in Sanskrit, Hindu epics. The small-scale semi-figurative works *Woman with Kite* (1953) and *Two Women* (1953) exhibit an interest in flatness, line, and geometry, which Gaitonde eventually explores exclusively after abandoning depictions of human or animal figures in pursuit of what he called non-objective art, which can also be translated as "objectless art." The term itself is traced back to the Russian constructivists, who placed an emphasis on geometry and spirituality that was not articulated through religious faiths but was deeply invested in mysticism. Theosophy was such a school of anti-rationalism, founded in New York with chapters throughout South Asia and Europe. It drew from "Eastern" systems of belief, and influenced artists such as Hilma af Klimt, Klee, Mondrian, and Kandinsky, who themselves had an affinity with Asian aesthetics that had influenced their work and were then cited by Indian modernists.[294] In Gaitonde's *Cycle Location* (1953), although he is working in a small scale with watercolor on paperboard, the almost square painting echoes the color palette and style of Klee's *Two Heads* (1932), only Gaitonde's has done away with any human referent. Squares and

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[294] Poddar, *V.S. Gaitonde*, 32. On Western Theosophic movements and modernists, see Peter Fingesten, "Spirituality, Mysticism and Non-Objective Art," *Art Journal* 21, no. 1 (Autumn, 1961): 2-6. Kazimir Malevich, in late 19th century Moscow was drawn to mysticism and the occult against organized religion, such as Russian Orthodox Christianity.

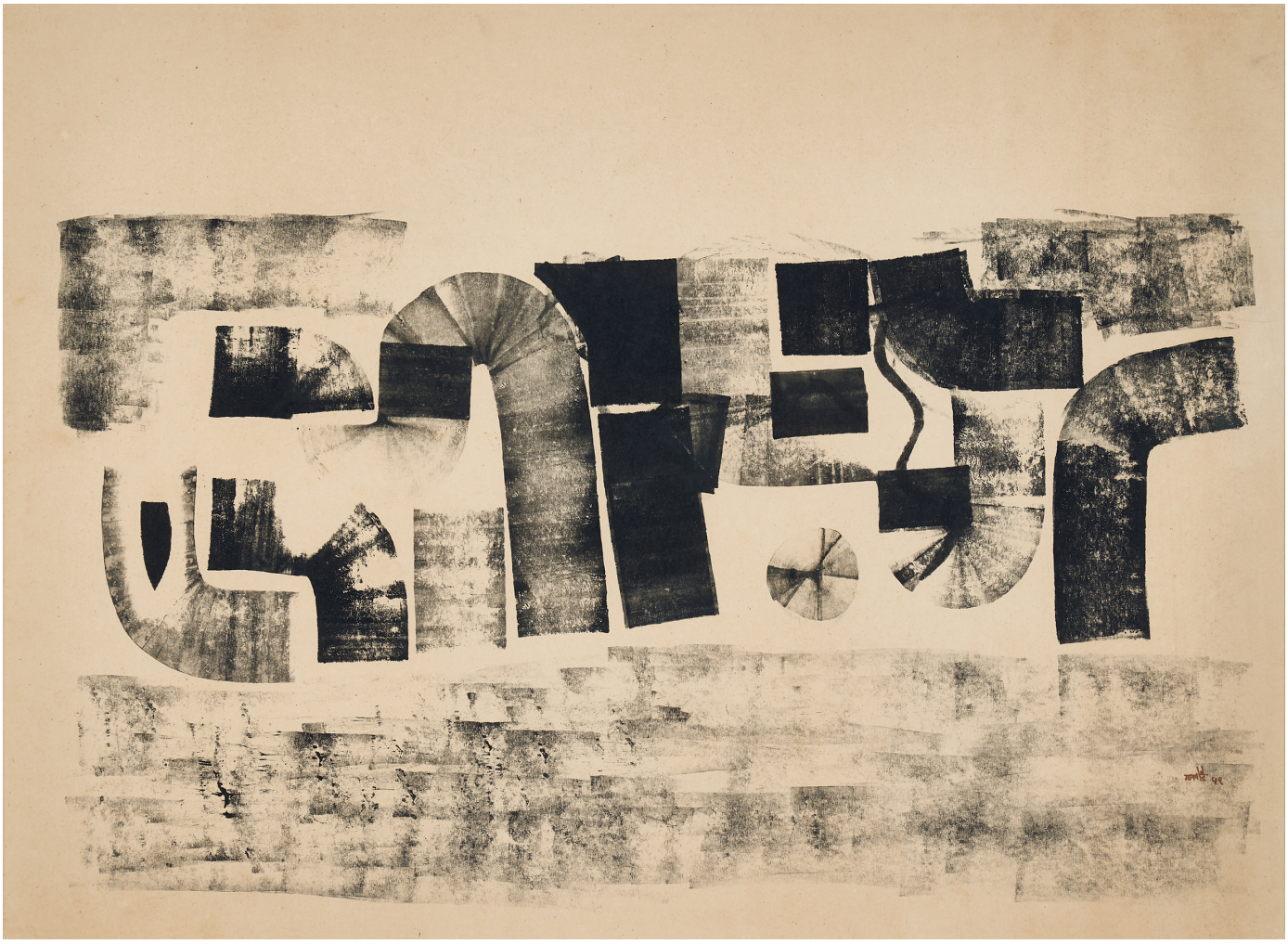

FIGURE 28. V.S. GAITONDE, *UNTITLED* (CA.1960)

rectangles are bisected, subdivided, and cut at angles, against a background of beveled cubes overlaying other geometries in light shades of ochre, white, and burnt orange. The only human-ish feature left in an otherwise purely geometric work are two circles that approximate the eyes in Klee's painting. By the mid-1950s, Gaitonde began working exclusively in his non-objective style, now with oil on canvas. These canvases are much larger, with no relationship to the smaller scale of his previous watercolors; they have a richer color palette in which the artist experiments with palette knives and

rollers to manipulate the paint across his canvases to achieve a flat and numinous effect (fig. 28). Even his titles betray a shift in style, scale, and interest: *Abstract* (1959), *Painting in White* (1961), *Painting in Brown* (1961), *Abstract* (1964). This is all before Gaitonde traveled to New York on a Rockefeller fellowship in 1964 where, much to the disappointment of his hosts, he mostly watched films in the cinema.[295]

During Mohamedi's time at Bhulabhai, both she and Gaitonde worked with ink on paper, using aleatory techniques, and experimenting with tools such as rollers on larger canvases with oil paint. There are a series of works in watercolor and ink on paper that Gaitonde makes at this time, such as *Untitled* (1962, fig. 29) which is a work on paper but at the larger scale of his paintings, and oriented horizontally.[296] In it, thick black lines are drawn from either edge towards the center, but do not touch, while strips of what seem like blocked rectangles are drawn from this implied horizon on both sides, in gradients of black and grey that, it seems have been blocked, as their edges are crisp. Mohamedi has a series of semi-translucent India ink drawings on paper, too—some are semi-naturalistic, resembling small branches or rhizomatic roots, combined with large washes of black horizontal fields, some long, some short, such as *Untitled* (ca. 1960, fig.

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[295] Ibid., 26-17. Other artists who traveled on Rockefeller foundation grants to New York in the 1960s and 70s include Krishen Khanna, Tyeb Mehta, K.S. Kulkarni, Ram Kumar, Jyoti Bhatt, Akbar Padamsee, K.G. Subramanyan, Avinash Chandra, Natvar Bhavsar, Paritosh Sen, and Adi Davierwala. The grants were sponsored by the philanthropic American collector John D. Rockefeller III and ended in the 70s. From the 1980s onwards the Asian Cultural Council offered grants to Vinod Dave, Bhupen Khakhar and Rekha Rodwittiya.

[296] This work of Gaitonde's in the Humbold Arts Council in the Morris Graves Museum, Eureka, California. See Poddar, *V.S. Gaitonde*, 29.

FIGURE 29. V.S. GAITONDE, *UNTITLED* (1962)

FIGURE 30. NASREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (CA. 1960)

30). These works are all also oriented horizontally, and left Untitled. There are also oil paintings from this period, which is in the extended family's Sikander and Hydari collection.[297] It is another horizontally-oriented oil on canvas, in shades of translucent grey beneath which the white plays and comes to the surface of the painting. The painting surface is rendered flatly, with the roller's smooth strokes, which exaggerate the horizontality of the canvas. Short strokes of a darker gray paint are layered upon the lighter background that itself blends and blurs with areas of intensified grey-black horizontals, smaller squares and some scratched black lines like hieroglyphic marks or geometric scrawls that read organically despite the geometry of the piece. This work bears an uncanny resemblance to Gaitonde's *Untitled* (1962)**.** It is a white-grey oil on canvas, oriented horizontally with bands of scratched black paint that creates horizontal zones of markings alongside a circular shape with blurred edges, and a tighter circle with soft edges. Both works have a strong horizontality, emphasized by the shapes that emerge in their paintings, and a similar palette of white and grey that they build up on surfaces with the darkest shades creating more horizontal movement, somewhere between a horizon in a landscape or a line of text on a page.[298] As Gaitonde's works are signed and dated, while Mohamedi's are not, we can only mark Mohamedi's in relation to his.

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[297] Altaf Mohamedi, ed., *Nasreen In Retrospect* (Bombay: Ashraf Mohamedi Trust, 1995), 61.

[298] See: Mohamedi, ed., *Nasreen In Retrospect*, 62; Poddar, *V.S. Gaitonde*, 65.

FIGURE 31. NASREEN MOHAMEDI, *COLLAGE* (1967)

There is a fascinating mixed media painting titled *Collage* (1967, fig. 31) by Mohamedi held by the Tata Institute for Research (TIFR), in its rich collection of Indian modernist paintings from the post-independence period.[299] *Collage* is a large mixed-media work on paper with India ink and collaged black and white photographs; one

[299] See Chatterjee and Lal, *The TIFR Art Collection*. We are able to date this piece due to its acquisition, to 1967, a few years after the artist begins to work with photography. The government of India at this time, under Nehru, dedicated 3% of its annual budget to public, fine arts and sculptural commissions; this work was not publicly commissioned. Archival documents included in *Stretched Terrains*, curated by Roobina Karode, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, February 2 –July 31, 2017.

blue tinted cut is either a tinted photograph or clipped from a magazine.[300] *Collage* resembles the ink and watercolor on paper works the artist began at Bhulabhai, with the thin black capillary lines that resemble rhizomatic forms extending across more than half of the work, accompanied by translucent black ink washes, below which the paper is still visible. Atop this painted surface, in the lower right portion of the page, the artist affixed three collaged black and white photographs and one blue tinted image. Above the collage papers floats a black inked circle, referencing Gaitonde's use of the circle against his horizontal marks in his early to mid-1960s ink and oil paintings. The three black and white collaged photographs are cut roughly into odd shapes; a rounded backwards C-shape of an unidentifiable image is torn at the corners, and below it an edge of a photograph with a graphic, patterned floor that resembles the geometry of early modern subcontinental baolis (step wells), with dark shadows cast by the short rise of their stone steps. To the right of this is one black and white photograph that looks like a photogram in which a person's palm is visible, cut in a strange shape with a sharp tail and fatter top, above which the blue tinged image with a black edge is placed. The work is strange and beautiful because, I argue, it marks a transition in Mohamedi's practice from which she shifts from painting to photography, and in which photography is incorporated into the artist's work before she shifts her practice exclusively to drawing. The collaged objects, their rotation, their vague reference to the subject matter

[300] Chatterjee and Lal, *The TIFR Art Collection*, 119.

of the photographs, the ink washes, and line work are all indicative of Mohamedi's shifting interest from the canvas to the page, towards an interest in the rotation of objects within the space of the page, rather than the surface of the pictorial plane of her paintings. It is also a shift marked by the artist's embrace of process over final product, in which the work is less important than the epistemology of aesthetics which were not divorced from everyday life, but integrated within it.

Afterimages: Indian Ocean Itineraries (1964-1972)

In 1964, Nasreen Mohamedi set off to the deserts of Rajasthan with the artist M.F. Husain, she with her black and white camera and he with his 16mm Bolex.[301] Husain, a charismatic and now acclaimed painter, set off to "tackle the film medium with the feeling of a painter."[302] There are black and white photographs by Mohamedi attributed to this trip. One photograph is of the Thar desert in Rajasthan, and has been written about only to identify it as having been taken on this trip with Husain.[303] If we look at the photograph carefully, we see a series of stones resting upon one another running

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[301] Mohamedi's family store, Ashraf's, in Bahrain was one of the first stores to sell imported goods, which included cameras and photographic equipment, so Mohamedi had ready access to expensive photographic equipment including cameras. Dr. Ahmed al-Dailami in conversation with the author, London, 2018.

[302] Husain's film, released in 1967, was awarded the The Golden Bear at the 17th International Film Festival that year in Berlin. The film begins with a zoom in of Husain in salwar kameez on a carpet, a brush in his right hand in front of a canvas he is working on, speaking to the camera in English. Husain recounts at the beginning of the film, "I have tried to tackle the film medium with the feeling of a painter." M.F. Husain, *Through the Eyes of a Painter,* 16mm, black-and-white, 17:35, 1967, Films Division, Government of India.

[303] See: Terracciano, "Fugitive Lines"; Brinda Kumar, "The Elegant Complexity of Nasreen Mohamedi"; Karode, *Nasreen Mohamedi*,17-46; Watson, "Nasreen Mohamedi: Passage and Placement."

across the foreground of the page, with an empty area behind them, and then a field scattered with stones that extends until the landscape rises into a hill with residential architecture of a town nestled beside it. The photograph is very overexposed, a characteristic of many of Mohamedi's photographs, which produce a more graphic feel. This image, more than a look at the desert, focuses on stone from quarries in Rajasthan set against the state's semi-arid landscape. Much like the photographs Mohamedi takes in Bahrain and Kuwait, the images are highly attuned to modernization and industrialization's impact on the built environment.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mohamedi had just returned to Bombay from the Gulf and was moving between Bombay, where her family lived, and Delhi, where she was living and working in a barsati in Nizamuddin basti.[304] Nancy Adjania locates the pre-history of new media art in India to this period, when Akbar Padamsee established the Vision Exchange Workshop (VIEW) from 1969 through 1972,[305] with a darkroom, film cameras (a Bolex and super 16) and even free film, which was incredibly

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[304] A number of key modernist Indian artists were living near to one another in the neighborhoods of Jangpura and Nizamuddin in Delhi in the mid-'60s and '70s, including M.F. Husain, Akbar Padamsee, Krishen Khanna, Zarina, Nasreen Mohamedi, V.S. Gaitonde, and Tyeb Mehta. See Krishen Khanna, *The Time of My Life: Memories, Anecdotes, Tall Talk* (Delhi: Viking, 2002). Zarina mentions that Nasreen had just returned to Delhi from Kuwait or Bahrain in the '70s. See Shirazi, "Feminism for Me Was About Equal Pay for Equal Work." Gulam Mohammed Sheikh also notes that she is present at the conversation on printmaking for *Vrishchik,* discussed in the previous chapter.

[305] Akbar Padamsee's Vision Exchange Workshop (VIEW) was established in 1969 in Delhi and then shifted to Bombay. Padamsee founded VIEW after receiving a Nehru Fellowship, matched the funds provided with money of his own, to purchase equipment and rent a space for artists to work in together, with shared resources. Archives of Akbar Padamsee, Bombay, India. See also Karode, *Nasreen Mohamedi: Waiting Is a Part of Intense Living*, 35-36.

expensive at the time.[306] If Bhulabhai was an art hub in the 1960s, VIEW was a hub for artists, filmmakers, writers and psychoanalysts for these three years.[307] In this short time, Padamsee made his first films—the abstract, experimental stop-motion animation *Syzygy* (1970), that consists of a series of line drawings animated by Ram Mohan, and the no longer extant *Events in a Cloud Chamber.*[308] The artist Gieve Patel made a film on Irani cafes and Kumar Shahani made films in collaboration with a psychoanalyst. The young artist Nalani Malani also made her early experimental films with the support of VIEW's equipment, poignant non-narrative portraits of the city which were remarkable for using gender as a lens of analysis.[309] Malani and Mohamedi forged a close friendship and worked side-by-side in the darkroom at VIEW on Nepean Sea Road.[310]

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[306] Nancy Adajania, 'New Media Overtures before New Media Practice in India', in Gayatri Sinha (ed.), *Art and Visual Culture in India 1857-2007* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009), 267-270.

[307] Shanay Jhaveri, "Building on a Prehistory: Artists' Film and New Media in India, Part 1," *LUX,* May 2, 2014, https://lux.org.uk/writing/building-prehistory-artists-film-new-media-india-part-1. In a progress report sent back to the Nehru Fellowship, Padamsee notes that Nasreen Mohamedi and Zarina Hashmi visited VIEW in 1970, and that artists were making good use of the space and its equipment. Archives of Akbar Padamsee.

[308] The filmmaker Ashim Ahluwalia has made a short film based on this film of Padamsee's, with the same title. See Murtaza Vali, "Events in a Cloud Chamber," *Future East*, http://futureeast.com/news/26-nov-24-dec-2016-events-in-a-cloud-chamber-at-jhaveri-contemporary; *Ashim Ahluwalia: Events in a Cloud Chamber,* Jhaveri Gallery, Bombay, November 26–December 24, 2016.

[309] Jhaveri, "Building on a Prehistory."

[310] Nalani Malani in conversation with the author, Bombay, December 2017. Malani assisted Mohamedi in hanging her 1974 show at Jehangir Gallery in Bombay and considers her India's first installation artist due to the attention and method by which she arranged her works within the space, thinking of the way in which the works were encountered and related to one another. "Malani was the youngest member of The Vision Exchange Workshop, and within six months completed three films and a series of other studies using a Bolex camera and 16mm reversal stock. Two of her films *Still Life* (1969) and *Onanism* (1969) were explicitly concerned with the female subject." Jhaveri, "Building on a Prehistory." Nada Raza observes that Malani's photograms were produced "using paper cut-outs and dodging and burning techniques learnt through experimentation in the darkroom and through conversations with artists such as Mohamedi, whom Malani has acknowledged as an influence." Nada Raza, "Nalini Malani, *Untitled I*, 1970/2017," *Tate*, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/malani-untitled-i-p82088 (accessed August 10, 2019).

The photographs of most interest to me are the experimental images Mohamedi worked on extensively in the darkroom, combining techniques of photograms in images developed from photographic negatives. These photographs are deeply invested in a kind of hapticality and experimentation that mirror her drawing practice, where light supplants graphite and ink as her medium. Mohamedi's photographs retain that aura that Walter Benjamin mourned with the rise of mechanical reproduction. To draw from Susan Buck-Morss's reading of Benjamin, Mohamedi's photographs "restore the instinctual power of the human bodily senses for the sake of humanity's self-preservation, and…do this, not by avoiding the new technologies, but by passing through them."[311] Mohamedi works with cut outs and by creating stark contrasts through over exposure, burning and dodging techniques in a photographic process that draws from her multi-media collage paintings from the late 1960s.

Mohamedi's photographs that privilege the darkroom process are palimpsestic, numinous studies of space and temporality. Many of her photographs document early modern architecture set against the modernization of landscapes and their post-independence transformations of the urban landscapes. For example, two photographs of a thick, pre-modern wall that is attributed to her trip to Rajasthan, may in fact be of a colonial Portuguese architecture in Bahrain (fig. 32). In one such arrangement of two photographs, the lower image is over exposed, with its walls slightly bleached out,

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[311] Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (Autumn 1992): 5.

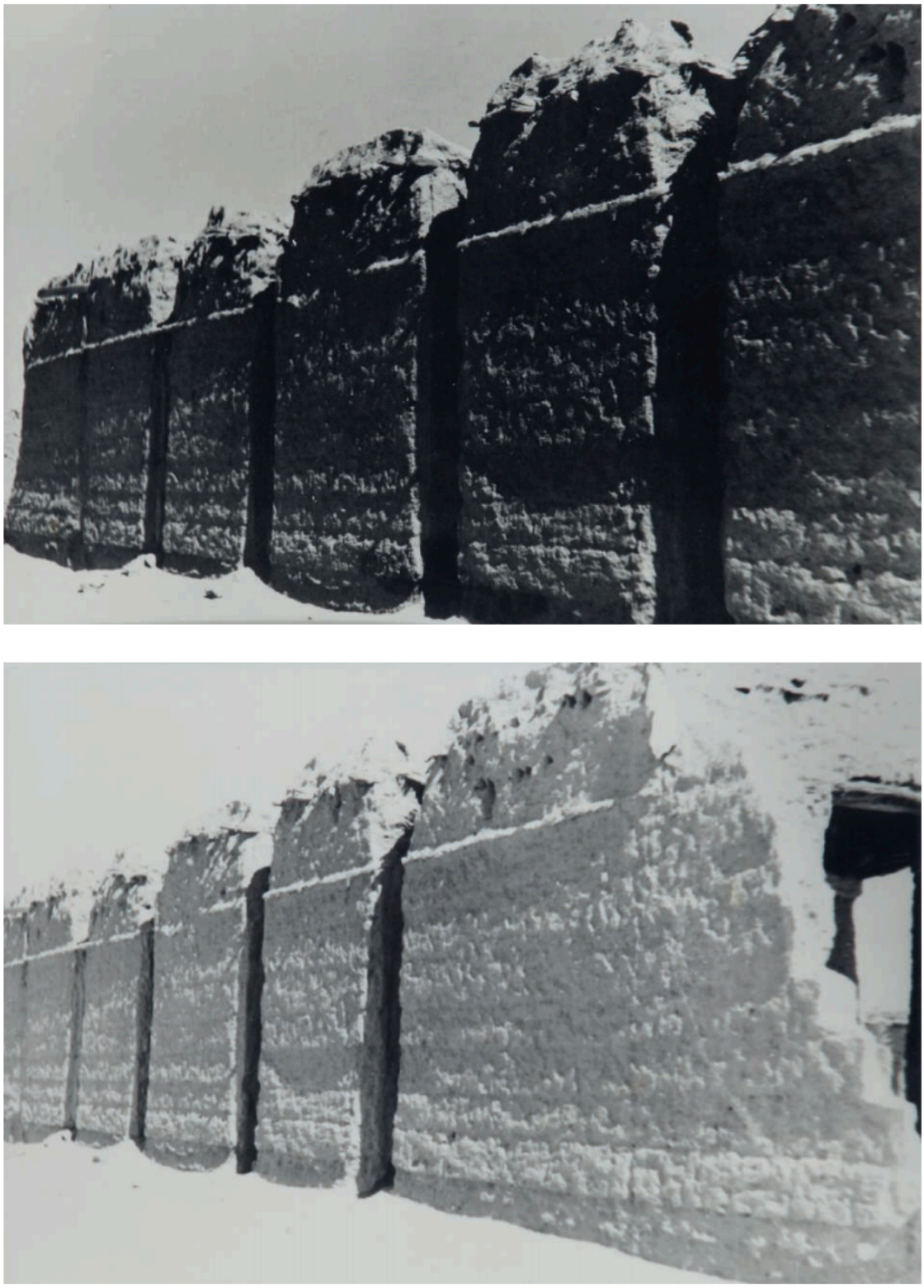

FIGURE 32. NASREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (DATE UNKNOWN)

below a darker, textured print. In the darker image, metal drain pipes that penetrate the wall are readily visible, the result of crude renovations. Another photograph from Bahrain is of the pre-modern, residential architecture in al-Muharraq (fig. 26), a small island off of the larger island of Bahrain, and its previous capital before it was shifted to Manama in 1932. These photographs are compelling and invaluable archival images that document the transformation of the landscape at a time that brought pre-modern architecture in high contrast with modern architecture due to economic and geographic change in India, Kuwait, and Bahrain in the 1960s and 1970s.

Mohamedi's photographs are especially important documents of transformations wrought on architecture and the built environment in Kuwait and Bahrain along the Indian Ocean routes she traveled. In 1963, after returning to Bombay from Paris where Mohamedi was on a French Government Scholarship, the artist traveled to Rajasthan and photographed stone drawn from quarries, and then traveled between Bahrain, Kuwait and Bombay.[312] In Bahrain she witnessed a corollary, rapid transformation of the landscape from a cosmopolitan, pre-modern mercantile economy under British colonial rule to an independent nation-state with modern finance capital, beginning in the mid-1960s and accelerating through independence into the '80s. These transformations were reflected in Bahrain's built environment; the emergence of modern oil rigs, industries, and modern architecture created a marked contrast with pre-modern

[312] From 1961-63, Mohamedi resided in Paris and worked in the Atelier of Monsieur Guillard on a French Government Scholarship for artists from the newly independent Indian nation. Mohamedi, ed., *Nasreen In Retrospect*, 125.

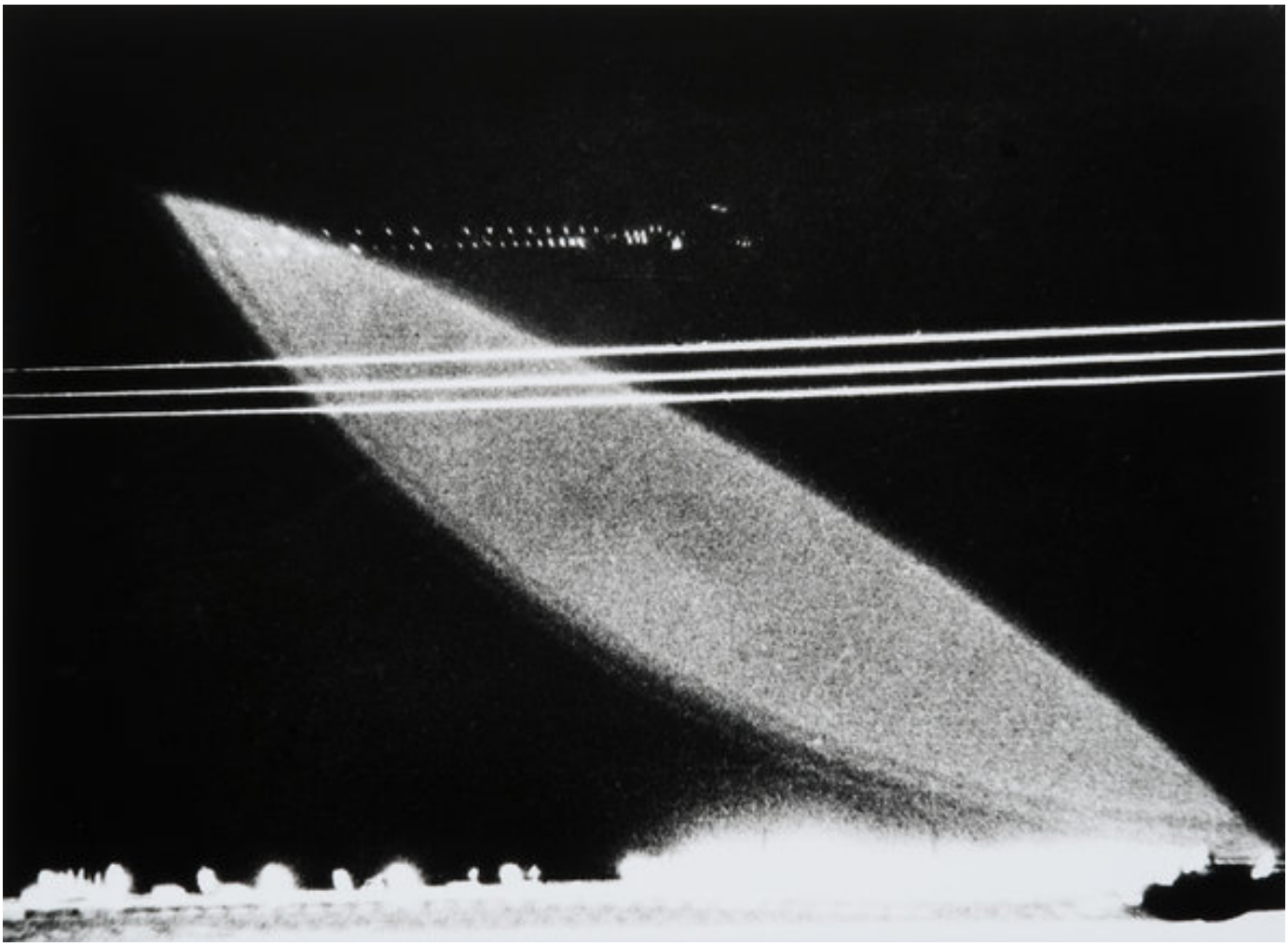

FIGURE 33. NAREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (CA. 1960)

landscapes and its Indian Ocean architecture.[313] There were significant populations of South Asians, South East Asians, East Africans, Arabs, and Iranians, as well as mixtures of these groups, in Bombay, Kuwait City and Manama, which included mercantile families such as Mohamedi's, as well as newer migrants drawn to work opportunities in the growing oil and industrial economies of all three port cities.[314]

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[313] India was the first country to gain independence from the British in 1947, with Kuwait achieving independence in 1961 and Bahrain in 1971.

[314] The national identities further differentiated groups that would have self-organized around different forms of affiliation and belonging beyond modern, territorial citizenship that transitioned after independence from the pre-modern to a post-independence modernity.

Mohamedi had two solo shows in Bahrain at the British Council in the 1960s. The first exhibition of paintings was held in March of 1966, while her subsequent exhibition in June 1969 included both paintings and photographs. It is from the only extant review of the artist's 1969 solo show in Manama that it is clear that she exhibited her photographs. Critic Ahmed Kassim al-Sunni observed: "The photographs she exhibited [are] in squares, oblongs and curves on a plain ground, in a rhythm appearing in symbols of coloured spots and crosswise flowing soft lines."[315] The soft lines and colored spots in a number of Mohamedi's photographs immediately come to mind, particularly one photograph that dates from the mid-1960s (fig. 33). This photograph was made while the artist was traveling frequently between Bombay, Bahrain, and Kuwait and may have been exhibited at the British Council. In it we see a nighttime scene in an oil field, a flat topography that extends deep into the distance. The horizon is low, barely at a finger's breadth, leaving most of the photograph a large expanse of nighttime sky. The landscape is overexposed to a bright white, the horizon is not a line but a datum of electric illumination. Flashes of this penumbra mark it at intervals slowly reaching a crescendo towards the right of the image, bleeding into one another, as if on fire. From this corner of the photograph a large, oblong shape reaches diagonally across the paper, a textured grey that sits against the even flatness of the black sky and the shallow, white foreground. This shape resembles the sail of an Indian

[315] Both exhibitions were held in the exhibition hall at the British Council's Al-Moayyed Building in Manama, Bahrain. Ahmed Kassim al-Sunni, "Exhibition Review," 1966 and 1969. Archive of Gulam Mohammed Sheikh.

Ocean dhow that is cut through by three soft, white lines. Above these three lines we see what looks like a miniature landscape of two short rows of small bright orbs of light that terminate in the sail.

The entire photograph is a play between foreground and background, flatness and depth drawn by light and the extreme contrasts of black and white. Mohamedi worked this image extensively in the darkroom, overexposing parts of it to obliterate the texture of the oil field, melding it with the electric lights into a bright white foreground and using string to dodge the image. The process relies on chance and extensive time in the darkroom to achieve these effects; the photograph may have been printed repeatedly to achieve this final print. Two similar but distinct prints of this image exist, one in a family's collection and another with a private collector, though the small doubled rows of lights in the top third of the image are absent in one photograph. These numinous images, as I call them, exhibit the hands-on, haptic emphasis of the artists's practice that is exhibited in the process she used in her paintings that incorporated collaged photographs—as do her darkroom experiments, in which she overexposed negatives, and dodged and burnt her images while developing them, using unorthodox objects in the process such as string and computer punch cards.[316]

[316] These computer punch cards were commonly used from the late 19th century through the mid-20th century. "Nora Kennedy, Senior Photography Conservator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, recognized the combination of the irregular rectangular shapes and number placement as being a match for old computer punch-cards (Hollerith cards)" Kumar, "The Elegant Complexity of Nasreen Mohamedi," 18.

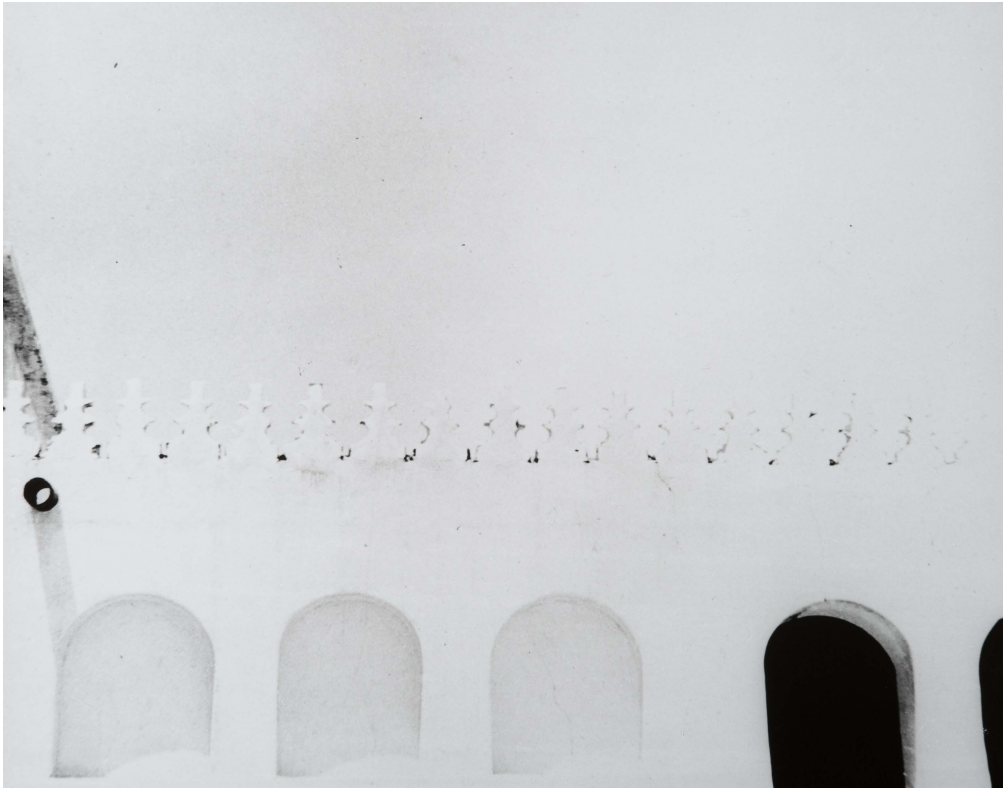

FIGURE 34. NASREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (DATE UNKNOWN)

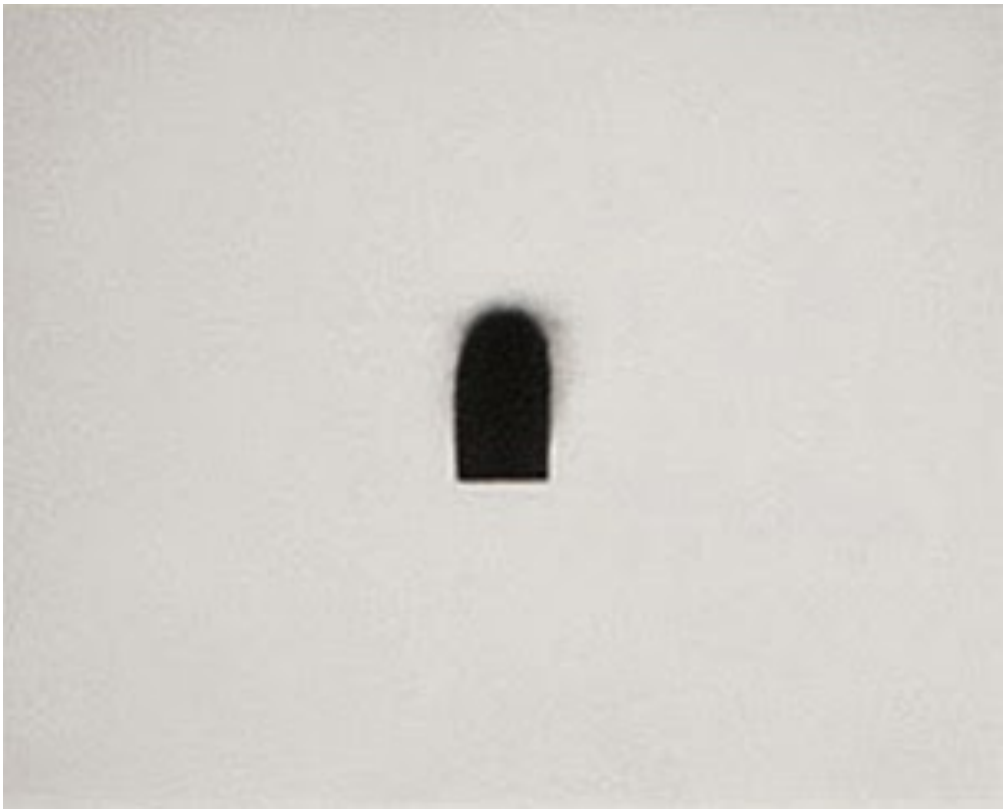

FIGURE 35. NASREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (DATE UNKNOWN)

Another darkroom photograph from this period is of an archway burnt in the center of the paper (fig. 35). The rounded top of the arch dissolves like smoke against the slightly textured white page. This photograph is similar in tone and treatment to another of the pre-modern Indian Ocean style residential architecture in Bahrain's al-Muharraq (fig. 34). In the photograph, taken from a courtyard, we see the rhythm of its arched arcade, three impenetrable niches and the black of an arch that penetrates into the home, with a sliver of another bleeding off the page. A large circular drainpipe extrudes from the wall, and above it we see the darkened edges of the courtyard crenellation lining the edge of the interior facade. Another image from this period consists of two extruded cubic shapes against bright white backgrounds; one cube with a line running through it has the texture of old stone; it is in the center of the page and casts a slight shadow beneath it. A fourth photograph is of three cubic objects in a row—two hollow cubic extrusions, side by side, and one solid rectangular extrusion, some distance away. All three cast shadows beneath them, and are the only objects with texture set against an otherwise bleached background. The artist overexposes all four photographs and relies on extreme contrast to produce an exaggerated flatness in the images.

Of her experimental photographs, whose surfaces are heavily worked in the darkroom, the artist developed a photograph from a negative and used photogram techniques of placing cut-outs on the surface of photosensitive paper as she developed

FIGURE 36. NAREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (CA. 1960)

the image.[317] In one photogram, we encounter a black background with thin white strips, some short others resembling an oblique L or a V shape, floating within the deep black space of the image. The artist may have laid these strips down and then exposed and continued to burn the image with strips of paper arranged atop the photographic

[317] In a conversation with Mohamedi's students, Gargi Raina and Nataraj Sharma in Baroda, they mentioned that she employed a young man who developed her photographs for her in a darkroom in Baroda, as she was less able to work in the darkroom independently. Gargi Raina and Nataraj Sharma in conversation with the author, Baroda, 2017.

paper. In a photograph taken in the mid-1970s of the Mughal era architecture of Fatehpur Sikri, the artist blocked out the image, creating a frame atop it with three shapes, two triangles and a square; the result is to confuse foreground and background (fig. 36). They are both the frame and part of the image, through which we get glimpses of the Mughal architecture, the sky, and ground.

Mohamedi's photographs are a far cry from the documentary image of renown Indian photographers who were capturing the changes wrought on people's lives by independence and modernization. Jyoti Bhatt, a colleague of Mohamedi's at the University of Baroda, sensitively photographed the disappearance of the built environment and folk traditions of rural India, Raghubir Singh captured the "decisive moment" in Indian life in full color, and Richard Bartholomew's black and white photographs show us the social life of artists and intelligentsia in Delhi in the '60s and '70s. Even Homai Vyarawalla, who was the first woman photojournalist in British colonial India, active from the 1930s through 1970, trained her lens on politics writ large.[318] Mohamedi's work is inverse to the "decisive moment" and the "political" image; it tarries with the question of time itself. While many of the artist's photographs have been reproduced from negatives posthumously, it's important to separate those reproductions from the ones that Mohamedi printed and worked in the darkroom, which is where I believe her greatest contribution lies.

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[318] See Sabeena Gadihoke, *India in Focus: Camera Chronicles of Homai Vyarawalla* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2006).

Mohamedi's work did not document the transformations of people's lives, but in some of her photographs, she did document transformations of the built environment—of architecture and landscape in the postcolonial context of the Indian Ocean itineraries. These photographs are rich archival references. For example, Mohamedi took a series of photographs of electric lines strung across Bahrain's desert landscape, which are more interesting for their subject matter than for their form. These are part of Mohamedi's exploration of infrastructural interventions that marked the changing landscape of the small island of Bahrain in the 1960s and '70s, from its transition as a British colony through to after its independence. There are also the photographs of the distinctive tulip flute and painted stripes of Kuwait's water towers. A Swiss construction company, VBB, were commissioned by the state to develop and implement a plan for a modern water-supply system for Kuwait. Construction of the thirty-one reinforced fluted concrete towers with their distinctive painted stripes began in 1970 and was completed in 1976. Kim Reddy, a student at the University of Baroda, wrote about the images in an undated essay in which he refers to Mohamedi's "late works" as those from 1973 and 1974. Reddy's essay was written, at the latest, in 1975, so I deduce that Mohamedi witnessed their construction and took photographs of one city district's group of completed towers.[319] Reddy also notes that Mohamedi's practice involved both

[319] Kim Reddy, "Nasreen Mohammedi [sic.]: An Analytic Study," undated (ca. mid-1970s), Archives of Gulam Mohamed Sheikh.

photography and drawing, and also provides us with descriptions of some of her now familiar photographs and others that we perhaps have not seen:

> The criss-crossing of electric wires punctuated with resting birds; the gigantic mushroom-like striped water reservoirs in the old fields; night shots depicting trailing lights and glowing neon bulbs; cracked mud walls; the tide washing the shore in Bombay coast line; and a score of other shots give a clarity of vision which become for her initial inspiration before any 'graphic' representation.[320]

These photographs should be understood as parallel to and leading the transition to Mohamedi's drawing practice. They reveal her preoccupation with the line and temporality, in both form and method, which are so central to her drawing practice. The close up photographs of looms are clearly illustrations of this but so are the strings she uses to dodge photographs. Although Mohamedi's interest in pre-modern architecture has been noted, I argue that it was during modernization that these differences in the landscape were rendered most starkly visible—the distinct scale and materiality of pre-modern Indian Ocean architecture in Manama or al-Muharraq against the scale of the steel and concrete oil rigs and water towers, set against the desert landscape. It is not a romantic or anti-modern gaze with which Mohamedi photographs these pre-modern forms and post-independence infrastructures. Her photographs are interested in the

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[320] Kim observes, "Photography and drawing are the major art expressions as far as Nasreen's representation is concerned. Besides there is stark interplay and resemblance between the two media. The series of photographs depicting the desert landscape of Bahrain: The desert landscape is most functionating [sic.] because of the violent illumination where light plays on different forms. Primarily everything in nature has an organic form and existence, in spite of the arid desert objects seem to have been reduced to heir most original form -i.e., into vibrations. The tonal values become all the more prominent so that we get to the root of the matter…" Reddy, "Nasreen Mohammedi." :

form and scale of these new monuments of industrial modernity in postcolonial landscapes, and bear witness to their uneven development and multiple temporalities.

Difficult This Tremor: Disability and Dependency (1970-1988)

Nasreen Mohamedi did not "suffer" from disability, she lived and worked with it. Her elder brothers also lived with the same genetic disorder and she mourned them as they passed away before her. Most writing about the artist and exhibitions staging her work, after her death, render the artist's career in a timeline that considers the increasingly spare linework of her late drawings as graphic evidence of the limiting effects of physical impairment due to her degenerative neuromuscular disorder.[321] The conflation of Mohamedi's exquisite line work with her disability risks an uncritical covering of her original contribution to abstraction. It impedes us from a rigorous formal analysis of the artist's drawings not solely as representations of an ailing body nor as not representative of the way Mohamedi moved with and through her body's abilities, with her hand and line-work emanating like vibrations from the sonic materiality of her flesh.[322] In an excerpt from Mohamedi's notebooks, the artist links pain as contributing to her daily practice of drawing, not detracting from it: "Where

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[321] Nasreen Mohamedi had Huntington's disease, as did two of her brothers, from which they all passed away before they reached their 60s. It is also assumed that she worked in photography due to physical impairment: "It is tempting to consider that as her facility with her technical and precise drawing tools became impaired, photography may have provided an alternate route for her visual practice." Nada Raza, "Nada Raza: The waves in my mind: Notes on Nasreen Mohamedi through the lens, and from the sea," *Tate*, https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/nasreen-mohamedi/sea-level.

[322] See Moten, *In the Break.*

pain is the essential growth of discipline."[323] Dedication to a disciplined daily practice alongside interest in questions of formal representation were borne out of Mohamedi's engagements with architecture and modernization's impacts on the built environment. The artist's drawings from the 1970s, I argue, are better understood as field conditions, rather than grids, and by the mid-1970s the paper she drew graphite across registers the vibrations of the artist's body over time, akin to an archive in which a person photographs themselves every day for over a decade, marking the changes wrought upon the materiality of their body by time itself.

Marta Russell and Ravi Malhotra refuse biological and physical-anthropological definitions of disability, foregrounding "disability" instead as a central contradictor of capitalism. For Russell and Malhotra, disability is a socially created category derived from labor relations that obfuscate how capitalism constitutes the "disabled body" through disabling social and environmental factors.[324] Eva Feder Kittay introduces the term "temporarily abled" instead of able-bodied to unhinge disability and dependency from the fixed subject position of a disabled person as against an able-bodied person.[325] The body is reconfigured by Kittay to consider the spatial capacity of the body *in time*, thereby recontextualizing disability within temporality rather than in relation to

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[323] Nasreen Mohamedi, diary entry, Nepal, June (1970). Mohamedi, *Nasreen in Retrospect*, 87-93.

[324] Marta Russell and Ravi Malhotra, "Capitalism and Disability," *Socialist Register* 38 (2002): 211.

[325] Eva Feder Kittay, "The Ethics of Care, Dependence, and Disability," *Ratio Juris* 24, no. 1 (2011): 49.

dependency, thereby highlighting the "dependency of everyone" which varies throughout life.[326]

I do not read Mohamedi's disability as anomalous from the practice of other artists at the time, nor do I give it overriding influence in determining the form of her drawings. I instead figure Mohamedi's body in relation to her drawing practice. In all of these drawings the page is a datum, I argue, with which Mohamedi measured the movement of time through her own body's vibrations, its tremors inflecting the lines she drew with discipline, daily, across the surface of small sheets of drafting paper. The drawings in reproductions look pristine and precise, while in person the line is much more variable. There are also spots on the paper, of water, spittle, wavering lines, that her student, the artist Gargi Raina, described not as precise but as "her attempt at precision."[327] Disability rendered Mohamedi's relation to temporality anew, with a marked difference from modernist artists who were working with the grand narrative style, painting with oil on canvas, which Mohamedi left for drawings with graphite and ink on paper, a motion towards the East as opposed to the West, towards ephemerality in her choice of cheap papers and towards a daily practice instead of an iconic work.

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[326] "Note that 'the dependency of everyone' may be understood in different ways, but we do not mean something like 'everyone is disabled' as a way to de-center the uneven distribution of ableism across bodies, identities, and experiences." Constantina Zavitsanos and Park McArthur, "Other Forms of Conviviality: The best and least of which is our daily care and the host of which is our collaborative work," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 23, no. 1 (2013), n.p.

[327] Gargi Raina and Nataraj Sharma in conversation with the author, Baroda, August 2017.

Mohamedi's work is episodic, and insists on daily repetition, a drawing practice in which the lines of her drawings register the shifts of her body.

Similar to tropes of disability in relation to Mohamedi's work is the reliance on Orientalist tropes of Islam and Islamic mysticism (Sufism) in writing that conflates abstraction with non-figurative "Islamic aesthetics." There is also the fact that "Islamic art"—what Iftikhar Dadi refers to as a catechristic term—*includes figural representation,* of the Prophet even, within Persian and Mughal miniature, as well as vernacular visual representations in the Shi'a community to which Mohamedi belonged.[328] This is alongside the fact that religious practice at the scale of everyday life and vernacular culture is constantly remade, contradictory, and evolving dependent upon its context and people's sociality. Shahab Ahmad puts forward the argument that we need to differentiate between Islam as a theoretical object or analytic category and Islam as a human and historical phenomenon when we use the terms "Islam" or "Islamic."[329] Ahmad foregrounds ways of being Muslim and the everyday lived reality of Muslim practices that draw from a wide range of Persianite, Arab, Indic sources, texts, and archives, as well as vernacular practices, although Ahmad does privilege Sunni devotional practices.

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[328] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia,* 2, 32.

[329] Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 116.

Mohamedi's work does not, in fact, evoke nor reference Islam symbolically or representationally and yet it is over-determined in most of the writing on the artist, which begs the question—why is Islam so central to writing on Nasreen Mohamedi's abstract drawings and experimental photographs?[330] Mohamedi's death in 1990 preceded the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the result of a coordinated, activist campaign, which did result in differentiating minority Muslim citizens of India from the larger polity of non-Muslim citizens, through which Muslims of all caste groups lost the privilege of being defacto Indian subjects.[331] Perhaps writing on Mohamedi, in the wake of Babri Masjid's destruction, unconsciously reflects this heightened attenuation to her Muslim subjectivity, whereas writing on her work during her lifetime, by Richard Bartholomew, Kassim al-Sunni in the *Khaleej Times*, and even Kim Reddy's essay on the artist for his course, do not fixate on either Islam or Sufism.[332] In regards to influence, Mohamedi, was deeply invested in improvisation in Hindustani musical forms such as thumri and khayal, which do not have scores but whose conventions are conveyed orally from singer to student. These forms of music are deeply affective and allow for a great degree of improvisation, and were deeply influential on the Western musical and

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[330] Art historian and critic Geeta Kapur, in a section on "Islamic aesthetics," observes that Mohamedi has "an understanding of geometry and light that the Arab civilization has developed and honed into a magnificent aesthetic." Geeta Kapur, *Nasreen Mohamedi: Waiting Is a Part of Intense Living*, 189.

[331] Mohamedi's death also preceded the Gulf War, the result of which was a geopolitical reorganization of the world and the beginning of British and American destruction of the state of Iraq that has defined the subsequent two decades, and preceded the dissolution of other cites of pilgrimage, trade, and cultural exchange between South Asia and Iraq, Syria and the Indian Ocean.

[332] Gulam Mohammed Sheikh in email correspondence with the author, August 2019.

artistic avant-garde in 1970s New York.[333] This musical influence on Mohamedi translated to aleatory processes in her drawing practice, in which her drawings are scores of a different vibration, attuned to the artist's body. Mohamedi's references to Panditji Biren Doshi and Ustad Karim Khan in her diaries add another dimension to her practice, that of emotion or affect in thumri and khayal and its influence on her work. Hindustani music and Indian philosophy came to the awareness of John Cage through his friendship with Geeta Sarabhai, yet Cage is then recursively said to influence artists ranging from Lala Rukh to Nasreen Mohamedi, for whom these musical forms were in fact indigenous, living musical traditions that they would have recognized and appreciated in the work of Cage, but did not need Cage to bring them to their attention.[334]

Mohamedi destabilizes the singular image in her work. Rather than stillness it is movement that concerns Mohamedi. The ebb and flow of the tide is brought in her photographs at Kihim alongside the blurriness of the edges between land and the horizon in Bahrain. Land is unstable territory for Mohamedi, unmoored by a notion of movement that privileges the ocean over the land. That line between images in a roll of

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[333] Mohamedi had visited New York in 1981 and stayed with Zarina, whom she met in Delhi when Jeram Patel introduced them to one another. Zarina connected Mohamedi to the Robert Blackburn Workshop and to Krishna Reddy in New York. Zarina in conversation with the author, New York, September 2016.

[334] It was through Cage's friendship with Geeta Sarabhai that he was introduced to Indian philosophical concepts of silence and chance. Sarabhai was also affiliated with Akbar Padamsee, for whom she scored his film *Events in a Cloud Chamber*, although there is no extant copy of the score, which was lost along with his film. See: Alexander Keefe, "Subcontinental Synth: David Tudor and the First Moog in India," *east of borneo*, April 30, 2013. https://eastofborneo.org/articles/subcontinental-synth-david-tudor-and-the-first-moog-in-india/. See also: Sadia Shirazi, "Stretched Terrains," *ArtForum Online*, July 2017, https://www.artforum.com/picks/stretched-terrains-69095.

film, a before and an after and an after still, in the sequential movement of frames in celluloid. Like Lala Rukh, who has a series of photographs of sand shot in Sri Lanka's port city of Gaddani that she mounted in one work, Mohamedi was drawn to the sensuousness of curves, and both looked across the Indian Ocean towards only a horizon not a shoreline. Unlike Lala Rukh, whose lines themselves curved languorously in short, contrapuntal poses in ink on paper, Mohamedi's inked lines are more indebted to descriptive geometry than the calligraphic khat.

A series of square graphite drawings from 1970, when the artist was living Delhi, are practically identical to the artist's photograms from the same period. In one drawing, three horizontal bands run across the page, two dark and one light, intersected by shorter, thinner lines set at diagonals. In another, the lower border of the page consists of a series of gradient bands atop one another that move from darker to lighter. Thinner doubled and single lines move rhythmically in relation to one another, both within this gradient border and floating above it against the white of the page. These drawings resemble Mohamedi's overexposed photographs in their high contrast that exaggerates the geometric lines and forms in the image.

The geometry of the water channel that Mohamedi photographed in Fatehpur Sikri, for example, is echoed in another set of square works in watercolor and collage on paper. These works lie somewhere between drawing and painting, with thick dark bands running from edge to edge, and lines including the L or open V-shape repeated

across the page at different scales, as if multiple photographic negatives have been laid one atop another, creating a palimpsest of the same image tessellating over time (fig. 37 and 38). The tone and quality of the work itself mirror the tactility and transparency of celluloid itself. These drawings, from the early 1970s, are the basis of further explorations that depart from the artist's experimental photographs, and move further into and beyond the pictorial plane of the page, from the mid-1970s onwards.

The influence of architectural methods and practice on Mohamedi is inarguable, although its relationship to her photographic and drawing practices has not been explored thoroughly. Mohamedi worked seated on the ground, at an adjustable drafting table with a parallel bar and T square rulers, using architectural drawing instruments.[335] A photograph of her Baroda studio is reproduced in exhibition catalogues and writing on the artist;[336] in the photograph, we see that Mohamedi removed the legs of the drafting table and propped it against the floor so she could be seated at a short, slatted wooden stool instead of a chair.[337] In addition to the tools the artist used is the fact that her drawings from the 1970s and '80s are all on the thin, disposable papers then in use in architecture firms and referred to as cartridge paper in India.[338]

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[335] Nalani Malani was gifted her the rapidograph pencil that she still has with her.

[336] Her drafting table was even part of her retrospective solo exhibition at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in 2016.

[337] Artists painting miniatures often sit on the ground as they work, as do those carving wood blocks used for block printing.

[338] Nina Sabani mentioned the name of the paper Mohamedi used. Author conversation with Nina Sabani, Baroda, August 2017.

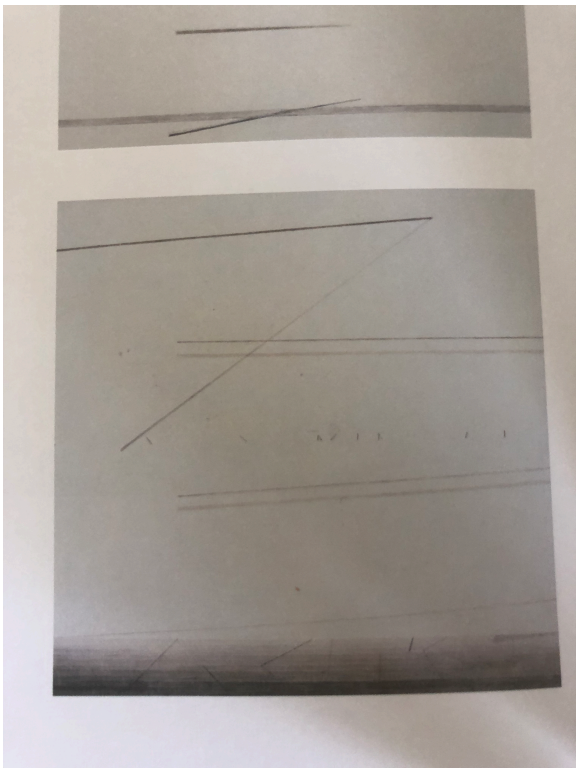

FIGURE 37. NASREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (DATE UNKNOWN)

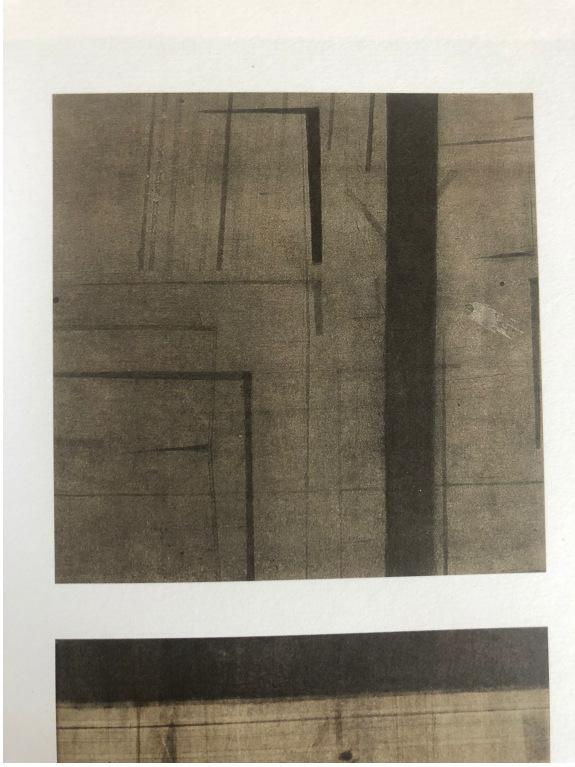

FIGURE 38. NASREEN MOHAMEDI, *UNTITLED* (DATE UNKNOWN)

Mohamedi's affinity with architecture was not superficial, but underscored preoccupations during a particular moment in India, Bahrain, and Kuwait's post-colonial modernization and the construction boom along the Indian Ocean routes the artist lived in. Another influence on Mohamedi was visiting the artist and designer Dashrat Patel in Ahmedabad at NID, where he worked from 1961 through 1981.[339] Mohamedi likely traveled there in the 1970s; it was during this trip that she met Louis Kahn, and visited his architecture studio while he was designing the India Institute of

[339] The Dashrat Patel museum is located in Alibagh, very near to Kihim, where Mohamedi spent every summer with her family, and where she is buried. After resigning from NID, Patel worked between Chennai, where he stayed with the dancer and artist Chandralekha and the writer Sadanand Menon, and his home and studio in Alibagh.

Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) with Balkrishna Doshi.[340] I attribute Mohamedi's photographs of looms to a visit to Ahmedabad's textile factories; Jeram Patel, another close friend of Mohamedi's from Bombay, had created promotional material for the factories as a commissioned graphic designer. J. Patel had worked as a Reader in Visual Design at the School of Architecture in Ahmedabad and as a design consultant for the National Institute of Industrial Design Ahmedabad. He and Mohamedi shared a formalist inclination, an interest in abstract forms drawn from nature and in materiality. Despite this their work has no formal overlap—J. Patel's work exhibits a hyper-masculinity in his blow torch sculptures on wood and his black ink drawings of mangled bodies. Both were disciplined artists and both worked with repetition, but Mohamedi's work is better situated alongside Padamsee and Malani's experimental films, the exploration of space in Zahoor ul Akhlaq, Lala Rukh's parallel investment in drawing and the darkroom, and Zarina's interest in premodern architecture and her inquiry into belonging and citizenship under the modern nation-state. Mohamedi can also be situated in sharp contrast to another abstract artist, J. Swaminathan, whose investment in both formalism and abstraction echoed Mohamedi, while his emphasis on masculinity and indigeneity solely centered men on the one hand, and Tantric influence on the other, an Indianness that excluded "Bombay Islam" and its influences.

[340] Nina Sabani in conversation with the author, Baroda, August 2017. The Indian architect Doshi had approached Kahn to work on the project with him as the local architect, while Kahn was also working on the National Assembly Building commission in Bangladesh. The construction of the National Assembly Building, or Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, took two decades, as it began when it was East Pakistan and was interrupted by Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. The IIMA building took over a decade from design to completion; Kahn was commissioned in 1962 and the building was completed in 1974.

This is in contrast to Mohamedi's work and persona which was, as Geeta Kapur has observed, "ungendered"—which I would take to mean that she lived outside of the prescribed gender roles of her caste and social world at the time, or undid gender through both her life and work, which were deeply entangled.[341]

Mohamedi's drawings moved from the early drawings that approximate photographic negatives in the early 1970s, when she was working in Delhi, to dense field conditions on the page, and then, in the mid-1970s, to drawings that explore the rotations of objects in time and space that pushed beyond the flatness of the picture plane. While Rosalind Krauss's "Grids" is used in writing (by Kapur, Kumar, and Terracciano) to frame Mohamedi's exploration of the grid, I see her work as at odds with Krauss's theorization and part of a distinct genealogy. Krauss wrote her oft cited and influential essay in 1979, the same year that Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published and Partha Mitter's *Much Maligned Monsters*. Krauss's essay traces the emergence of the grid "first in France, then in Russia and Holland," from pre-World War II cubist painting.[342] The grid "announces, among other things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse" and resides solely in "realm of exclusive visuality."[343] Krauss observes:

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[341] "Remember Nasreen's masculine face and frail limbs and ungendered artist-persona; remember her calling as an unrequited beloved, her narcissistic engagement with her body and the stigmata she barely cared to hide…" Kapur, "Elegy for an Unclaimed Beloved," 12.

[342] Krauss, "Grids," 50.

[343] Ibid.

> There are two ways in which the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art. One is spatial; the other is temporal. In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature. In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the gird is the means of crowding out the dimension of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface.[344]

Krauss continues to trace the historical emergence of the grid as "the emblem of modernity," and finds it in the 15th-16th century perspectival studies in Western Europe. She argues that (Western) perspective is tied to a "real-world referent," but "unlike perspective, the grid does not map the space of a room or a landscape or a group of figures onto the surface of a painting. Indeed, if it maps anything, it maps the surface of the painting itself."[345] Perspective, though, is not a universal visual technology and is absent from early modern paintings across South Asia. The technique of painting was not oil and canvas, firstly, but water-based pigments applied to paper, in which there was a deep investment in the materiality of the paper and its presence underneath the layered washes that were built up to achieve gradients of transparency and opacity. In miniature painting, as discussed in the previous chapter, the picture plane does not represent the real world but is instead a portal to another world. It is for this reason that flatness and multiple perspectives dominate miniature representational

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[344] Ibid.

[345] Ibid., 52, 55.

strategies, as opposed to linear perspective and a single view point, which characterizes Krauss's pre-history of the grid. Furthermore, painting, as an "art form" was not differentiated from "craft" and did not belong, framed, as an object hung on a wall or in churches or salons. It was instead part of courtly patronage and networks of circulation, first as part of illustrated manuscripts of the court and then as loose papers, collected in folios by merchants and courts. Some of these late folio works include portraits of merchants as well as princes, which show stylistic influence drawn from Western oil painting and portraiture, such as cherubs and theatrically drawn curtains held back by tassels that doubly frame the subject.

The early modern miniature painting, its flatness and pictorial methods, lie outside of the Krauss's Eurocentric theorization of the grid and its break with previous modes of representation.[346] In South Asia, the "grid" is part of early modern techniques of representation and continues to undergird the explorations of post-independent artists who revisit pre-colonial epistemologies, through close study of Mughal, Pahari, and Rajput miniature painting from Anwar Jalal Shemza and Zahoor ul Akhlaq in Lahore and S.B. Palsikar, V.S. Gaitonde, and Nasreen Mohamedi in Bombay. The grid in the context of the earlier, Akbari miniature (fig. 18) does not subscribe to linear narratives but contains multiple temporalities, and underneath it all is buttressed by a geometric formal structure atop which color and figures are laid. The division of space,

[346] Ibid., 54.

the traditions of representing hierarchies, of people and animals, the ways in which space unfolds, all rely on a structural logic. For example, trans-species representations abound of human and non-human animals, in which the visage of elephants, tigers, and fish are represented in profile while human faces may be represented in profile or three-quarters view. There is no resolution of the story of the grid in miniature, as there is no "sequential progress of the story."[347] Instead the painting allows for many viewers to enter into the painting, and does not cue one "sovereign" subject.

The grid, in Mohamedi's context, is a form in continuity with the pre-modern epistemologies of representation and a break with colonial ontologies of vision and the division of "art" and "craft." As a form, it was already separated from the real as a perceptual screen, and was not part of artistic movements defined by an increasing movement from symbolist art towards more "abstract" art with colonial modernity. Mohamedi and other artists working at the time—twenty years after independence from British colonialism, commensurate with the further partitioning of South Asia with the dissolution of East and West Pakistan—were situated in a post-colonial context, recovering from colonial modernity and undergoing modernization within all of its uneven geographies and multiple temporalities. Optics, the grid, nature, colonialism,

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[347] Krauss's articulation of the Western rift of the secular and sacred, in which "we find it embarrassing to mention *art* and *spirit* in the same sentence" is also at odds with most of the world's postwar, post-independence art practices, from North American minoritized artists to South and East Asian artists, too. Gaitonde, Mohamedi, and Padamsee, as well as Malevich and Agnes Martin, Etel Adnan, and Lygia Clark, amongst others, all mention an affinity to art and spiritual feeling. While none of them locates it solely within a particular faith, they all draw from a myriad of influences, without anxiety regarding their contradictions. Krauss, "Grids," 55.

modernity, all index a different history than Krauss's singular, hegemonic, sovereign subject. Mohamedi used the page as a portal, in which she rotated objects in deep time and in a "pure vision of non-physical space."[348] Furthermore, in postcolonial contexts, the industrial grid symbolizes a colonial technology of vision that is not exclusively a paradigm of British colonization or American neo-imperialism, but is a technology of extraction applied to landscapes that combines the logic of capitalism and racialization employed, even by postcolonial regimes, towards accumulation.[349] If it was previously the device of capital and racialized imperialism that was laid upon the colonized landscape to extract from the landscape and the people, it is now leveraged by hegemonic forces of neoliberal capital in the new racialized logics of the postcolony.

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[348] Karode, *Nasreen Mohamedi: Waiting Is a Part of Intense Living*, 43.

[349] Kapur observes: "The older imperialist markings were transferred to postwar USA where, as we know, it had become ideology proper. The American cultural establishment elicited from the boldly original and freedom-loving artists grouped together as American abstract expressionists, the slogan of cultural 'freedom' vis-a-vis the socialist bloc…. Those who had been part of the School of Paris, among them some of the best Indian artists of the 1950s, turned sympathetically to New York in the 1960s." Kapur, *When Was Modernism in Indian Art?,* 305. The grid was also a tool of colonial expansion. See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

Chapter 3. Lala Rukh: Ungendering the Gaze

Drawing as Feminist Praxis

When Lorca died, they left the balconies open and saw:
On the sea his qasidas stitched seamless in Arabic.
—Agha Shahid Ali, "In Arabic"[350]

Lala Rukh, artist, educator and activist, was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1948. In interviews she noted her interest in drawing and painting from early in childhood that was nurtured by her parents and educators.[351] She attended Queen Mary College in Lahore, a private, elite, English language school for primary and secondary school. Lala Rukh took classes at the Arts Council in Lahore's Alhamra Art Center, where Anna Molka Ahmed, a white British woman, was then the Head. Reputable painters such as Khaled Iqbal and Colin David taught at the Arts Council along with Ahmed, and the artist remembered a vibrant and varied community of artists and students when she was there in the 1960s. The Arts Council building that existed then was a small structure, later demolished and replaced by the brutalist complex designed by Nayyar Ali Dada. In its small theater, plays were performed and the singer Farida Khanum sang; the artist recalled seeing the poet whose words she sang, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, in the audience, "sitting at her feet."[352] Lala Rukh then opted to attend Lahore College as it

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[350] Agha Shahid Ali, "In Arabic," *Call Me Ishmael Tonight: A Book of Ghazals* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004).

[351] "Maliha Noorani Interview with Lala Rukh," *Asia Art Archives*, 2009, https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/library/interview-with-lala-rukh-2009-part-1-of-2.

[352] Ibid.

FIGURE 39. WOMEN'S ACTION FORUM FIRST CONVENTION IN OCTOBER, LAHORE (1982). LALA RUKH (RECLINING IN FRONT). FIRST ROW SEATED FROM LEFT: HUMAIRA RAHMAN, KHAWAR MUMTAZ, SULTANA BOKHARI, HILDA SAEED, NIGAR AHMAD. SECOND ROW FROM LEFT: SAMINA REHMAN, RUKHSANA RASHID, FARIDA SHAHEED, GHAZALA REHMAN, FAREEHA ZAFAR, NIGHAT SAID KHAN, ABAN MARKER-KABRAJI. STANDING FROM LEFT: FARIDA SHER, NAJMA SADEQUE. PHOTOGRAPH BY LALA RUKH.

was the only college with a fine arts program at the time. She subsequently obtained a Master in Fine Arts at Punjab University, again under Anna Molka Ahmed. During the artist's time at Punjab University their fine arts program included extensive history courses that had histories of art and architecture from South Asia in addition to Euro-

American histories of art. Funded by a Punjab government scholarship, she left Pakistan for the United States and completed a second MFA at the University of Chicago in 1976. The curricula at the University of Chicago had shifted from a more traditional, disciplinary approach to an interdisciplinary one, and it is here that Lala Rukh began working across photography, printmaking, drawing, and painting. She also took courses in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations with the Urdu literature and language scholar C.M. Naim and the poet and Indian literature scholar A.K. Ramanujan, amongst others.[353]

Shortly after Lala Rukh returned to Lahore, on July 5, 1977, General Zia-ul-Haq overthrew the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto with the support of the United States during the Cold War. Saadia Toor describes this period of the Cold War as the "decimation of the Left" in Pakistan.[354] Zia's government quietly passed the Hudood Ordinances in 1979, but it was the government's attempt to enforce the law in 1981 catalyzed the women's movement across Pakistan.[355] The first meeting of what would become a multi-city grassroots movement named Khawateen-

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[353] In the interview with Maliha Noorani, the interviewer mistakenly transcribes Ramanujan's name as "A.K. Armanujin." Ibid.

[354] For more on the relationship between nationalism, Islam, and the state in Pakistan during the Cold War, see Saadia Toor, *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

[355] I focus exclusively on the question of discriminatory laws against women here, while acknowledging that the Hudood Ordinances persecuted Sunni Muslim women as well as women from minority sects and non-Muslim women; they also included men from minority sects and non-Muslim men. This included the legislation against the Ahmadiyya community, which opened them to charges under the revised Blasphemy Law. This was a clear discrimination on the basis of religion which overwrote the original constitution of 1956. Saadia Toor, *State of Islam*, 136-137; Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 73.

Mahaz-e-Amal (Women's Action Forum) occurred in 1981 in Karachi at the office of a women's non-governmental organization called Shirkat Gah.[356] It then spread to other cities, and Lala Rukh co-founded the Women's Action Forum branch in Lahore in October of 1982 (fig. 39). WAF became a street activism based, non-hierarchical organization that was considered "a thorn in the side of Zia," and opposed his government's legal reforms that attempted to bring Pakistani law in conjunction with a particular interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence (fig. 40). After returning to Lahore, the artist taught classes at the Art Center and then for four years at her alma mater Punjab University as faculty, after which she became a fine arts faculty member at the federally funded National College of the Arts (NCA) in 1982. Although government employees are not allowed to participate in political activity, Lala remained very active in opposing military rule, and was constantly at risk of her political involvement being revealed and being fired.

Throughout the period of military rule and its attendant legal "reforms," Lala engaged in a daily drawing practice, focused on pedagogy, and organized street resistance against the government and its introduction of discriminatory laws with other women in the Women's Action Forum.[357] In 1985, she co-founded Simorgh in 1985,

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[356] See Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1987).

[357] The Council of Ideology was established under the government of Ayub Khan in 1962 and drafted the Law of Qisas and Diyat that I refer to here in 1980, which was then passed by the Majlis e Shoora, or Federal Council, in 1984. Ibid., 110.

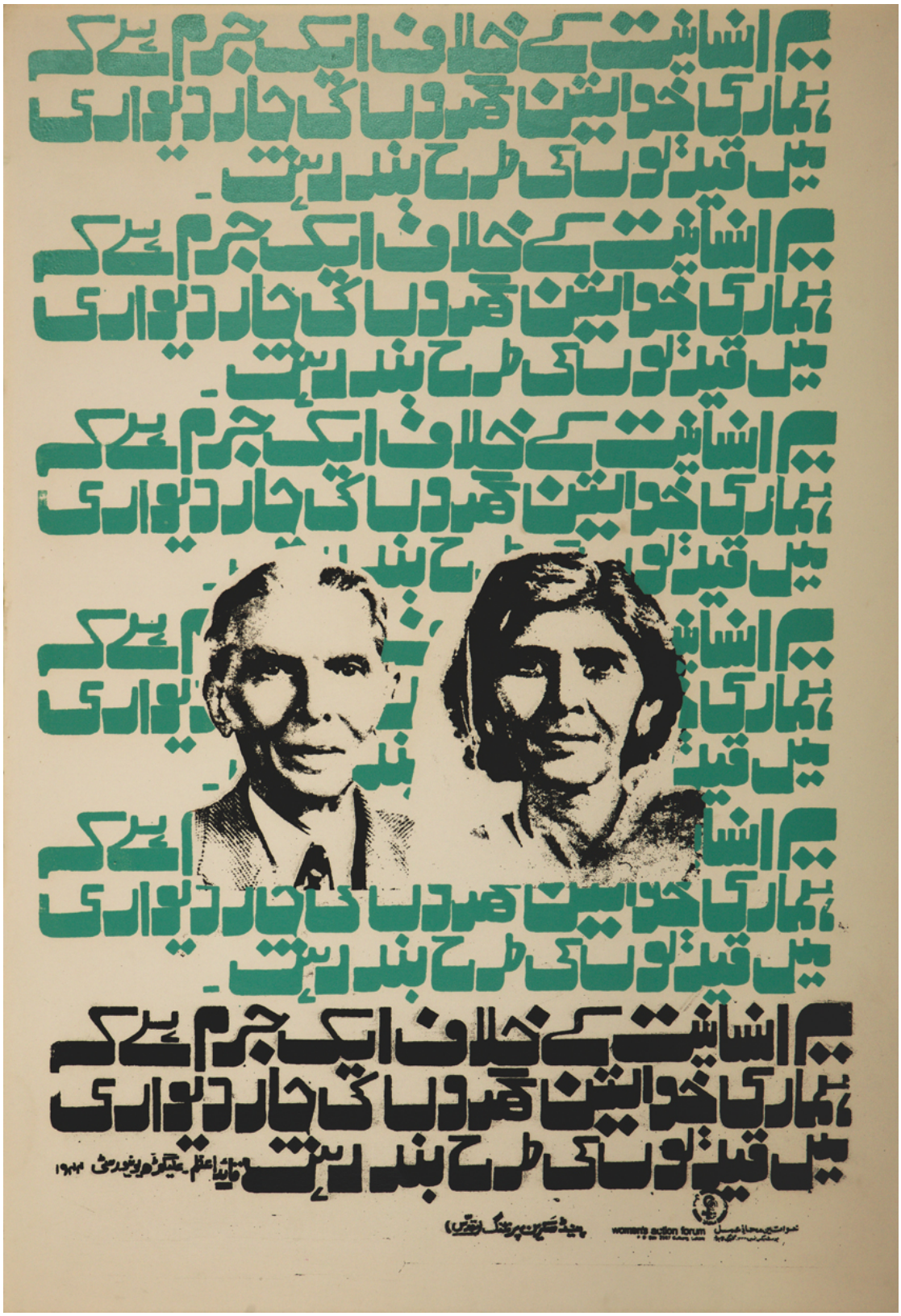

FIGURE 40. LALA RUKH, POSTER FOR WOMEN'S ACTION FORUM (1982)

a feminist non-profit resource and publication house, which was named after the fabled bird from Persian epic poetry. Simorgh organized the first "Muslim Women's Conference" in Lahore, which invited the Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi to speak, and published books and articles in both Urdu and English. During the era of military rule, Lala Rukh was actively engaged in the women's movement within Pakistan and across India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. She also organized printmaking workshops for women across South Asia and created an instructional booklet for DIY printmaking that permitted women to produce material that was otherwise censored by printing houses or the state.

It was a decade later, in the 1990s, that Lala Rukh reoriented her focus and dedicated more time to a solitary art practice. She created two series of artworks that I am interested in that combine calligraphy, landscape painting, Urdu poetry, and photographic techniques: her *River in an Ocean* (1992-93) series and *Hieroglyphics: Koi ashiq kisi mehbooba se* (1995), whose title borrows a line from a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz.[358] Although Lala Rukh made a large body of work in the 1990s, she only came to the attention of a wider audience beyond Pakistan through international exhibitions almost two decades later. These include her exhibition at the Sharjah Biennial 12 in 2015, and then at documenta 14 in 2017. The seeming belatedness of these exhibitions and her death at sixty-nine during the run of documenta, from a recurrent cancer, are better

[358] "Koi ashiq kisi mehbooba se" translates in English to "Some lover to some beloved." It is a line from Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem of the same title.

understood as part of a temporality that irrupts and interrupts concepts of teleology and linear progress in artist's practices, which Lala Rukh's career disrupts. Furthermore, art historical methods privilege the analysis of finished works over performative rearrangement through an emphasis on riyaaz, or improvisational daily practice. Although Lala Rukh has few finished artworks and periods of time during which she was deeply engaged in activism and pedagogy, I read this unevenness rather as times during which her work took different forms. Refusing the tyranny of the "artwork," I situate the primacy of process as a subversive potential that refuses the structure of a linear career and circuits of capital as emblematic of Lala Rukh's fugitive and minoritarian practice.

Throughout her life, the artist engaged in a daily drawing practice that I do not distinguish from the production of artworks as discrete, finite, closed objects of exchange, though I remain interested in both. My study begins with Lala Rukh's figure drawings of the early 1980s, in which I contend she begins to forge a particular quality of line work—one that I name "layta hua khat" (reclining line). Through her career, this layta hua khat provides the formal groundwork and conceptual means by which I contend that her practice resists and disrupts an essentializing, ontological gendering of the phallocentric, patriarchal gaze. Therefore, due to the lack of resemblance between her work and other representational feminist art practices of that era in Pakistan, her

work, though not her activism, remained opaque and untranslatable.

Nazar: 'Dekho Magar Pyar Se' / The Gaze: 'Look, But with Affection'[359]

Throughout the tumultuous era of martial law under General Zia-ul-Haq, Lala Rukh never stopped drawing.[360] Every morning, while the state was passing new laws that diminished the legal status of women, the young artist drew a nude male model in the privacy of her home and studio, a quietly defiant act. While the passage of the Hudood Ordinances and other new directives—such as the Law of Evidence,which reduced a woman's legal status to half that of a man[361]—regulated and legislated the woman's body, her juridical value, dress code, appearance, and visual representation in

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[359] This is a phrase often found painted on the side of trucks and rickshaws that is meant to ward against the evil eye, a gaze that carries with it an intention to harm, that is constituted by envy or malice, by the viewer. Nazar connotes the gaze but it also colloquially describes the evil eye.

[360] Maryam Rahman in conversation with the author, Lahore, January 2018. Maryam, Lala Rukh's niece, would occasionally join Lala Rukh for figure drawing sessions. General Zia declared martial law in Pakistan after the coup that brought him to power, from 1977-1985. He then called general elections in 1985 but remained President until he died in a mysterious plane crash in 1988. For a book of fiction that uses this event as its historical departure point, See Mohammed Hanif, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009).

[361] The Council of Ideology drafted a new Law of Evidence (Qanun-e-Shahadat) which was passed in 1983 after the Hudood Ordinances. The Council of Ideology was founded in 1962 under the government of General Ayub Khan. The Law of Evidence reduced a woman's testimony to half that of a man's, while non-Muslims were not even allowed to give evidence in cases involving Muslims. Its passage provoked a new round of WAF protests: "the Law of Evidence in 1983, which decreed that women's evidence was altogether excluded in 'hadd' (maximum) punishments, and halved for the lesser tazir punishments. Non-Muslims are not allowed to give evidence, in direct contravention of the country's Constitution, which guarantees equality of all citizens irrespective of caste, creed or sex." Hilda Saeed, "Women's Movement in Pakistan," in *Women Under Siege,* catalogue (Houston: Voices Breaking Boundaries, 2013), 18. The protest of women against the Law of Evidence resulted in their being beaten by the police; photographs of the march show women bleeding from head wounds, and the poet Habib Jalib who was reading poetry in support of the women's protests was also badly beaten. When these photographs of women from the middle and upper classes being subject to police violence were published in newspapers, they created more public support of the women's movement due to the outrage the photographs provoked. Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 110.

print and televised media, I contend that Lala Rukh's artwork refused the gender ontology of the state and its patriarchal gaze, as well as the reactive politics of representational feminist art.[362] The artist did not resist these newly legislated, restrictive edicts through the refutation of a patriarchal gaze at the site of their objectification—the body of the woman—a strategy taken up by numerous feminist artists in Lahore at the time.[363] This would have been much more legible as a normative feminist counter-representational response.

I contend that Lala Rukh offers us drawing as a feminist praxis and instantiates the possibility of a disruption to the gendered ontology of the gaze. Instead of reclaiming representations of the woman's body, Lala Rukh set her gaze upon the body of a man. I trace the way in which Lala Rukh's practice and artwork engender the gaze organized around a modern, and colonial, binary of gender that produces a male gaze trained on the body of the woman as a desired object, and, drawing from early modern art, resists it through a political, aesthetic, and philosophical ensemble—from working

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[362] In 1980, one year after the passage of the Hudood Ordinances, General Zia also issued a directive that women working in government offices had to cover their head and wear "traditional dress." The dress code of women television anchors changed to full sleeves and a dupatta (chadar) overnight; if they refused they were fired from their jobs. That same year, all women were banned from spectator sports. Mumtaz and Shaheed write that early in General Zia's military rule he made further concessions to Jama'at-e Islami ministers in government, accepting their demand for a women's university, in order to segregate the sexes, and directives on what women could wear. Vice squads began policing women in public spaces and women were accosted by civilians, as well. Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 73. See also Afshan Jafar, *Women's NGOs in Pakistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 29-30.

[363] The Law of Qisas (retributive justice) and Diyat (financial compensation for the victim or victim's family) was drafted in 1980 by the Council of Islamic Ideology, passed by the Majlis-e-Shoora in 1984, and presented in February 1985 to the National Assembly for approval. In Diyat, the blood money value of a woman was half of that of a man. Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 110. See also Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*.

in the traditionally masculine genres of calligraphy and landscape painting, to rendering men in her drawings with nisa'iyat or femininity. I also find this decolonial praxis in her transformation of the calligraphic line, or khat, from linearity and verticality into a canted or reclining line, her layta hua khat that I translate to the Alif in a dramatic dip. While this might be understood through Euro-American queer theory as a queering of the khat, I conclude by troubling the application of queer theory to a reading of the layta hua khat as I argue that it is in excess of the hegemonic frameworks of queer theory and its application without translation to what are variously called Islamicate, Persianite, Indo-Persian, South Asian, West Asian, and non-Western contexts. Akbar Naqvi warns repeatedly of "coercive Western theories" throughout his writing.[364] While I heed this warning, I trouble the distinction between East and West and tradition and modernity. I think this through an assemblage of theories and the works themselves. I attempt to do so through a method that Eve Sedgwick calls "reparative reading," against "paranoid reading," in interdisciplinary scholarship that draws together translation studies, non-western histories of art and decolonization, Black studies, Asian studies, gender and sexuality studies, as well as artists, poets, and activists situated beyond Euro-American epistemologies and thinking through multiple languages, forms and temporalities.[365]

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[364]Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 154.

[365] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 123-152.

“they were tearing up the pavement and using their *dupattas* as slings”[366]

While revisionist feminist scholarship takes up the history of the women's movement to critique its reversion to binary gender, it reproduces the logic it seeks to find, reducing this period of the women's movement only to a study of written scholarship produced by members of the women's movements. Ayesha Khan and Nida Kirmani argue that “even the scholarship produced by the women's movement which arose in response to a politicized Islamisation process begun under the military rule in the 1980s, inadvertently reproduces this [gendered] binary as activists sought to assert a rights-based agenda and were supported by international donor funds.”[367] This flattens differences in the history of the women's movement and its myriad organizations that fought through street actions and legislative reform, and overlooks the fact that WAF, unlike other organizations, never became a non-profit organization; that the idea of women's social life and street activism was not always aligned with rights-based advocacy within the organization; and that WAF never accepted any international funding, ultimately creating strife within the organization, resulting in many of its members founding offshoot non-profit organizations.[368] Khan and Kirmani mistake the duty of the scholar’s (re)search for historical “truth” as one which must

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[366] Maliha Noorani Interview with Lala Rukh, *Asia Art Archives*, 2009. https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/library/interview-with-lala-rukh-2009-part-1-of-2.

[367] See Ayesha Khan and Nida Kirmani, “Moving Beyond the Binary: Gender-based Activism in Pakistan,” *Feminist Dissent* 3 (2018): 151-191.

[368] Ibid.

simplify the heterogeneity, proliferation, and elaboration of lived experiences in necessarily *disorganized* resistance, in order to assert a specifically *organized* field of feminist struggle unified around a single issue and leveraged by singular (legible) expression of that purpose. Such processes can work to erase difference while limiting the movement solely to sources of written scholarship, an act itself which then renders only *representational* any incursion to the dominant paradigm, rather than allowing for and moving with those abstractions, metonymies, and practices that refuse, evade, or remain appositionally fugitive to the very frame of both the dominant paradigm and the revisionary apparatus that seeks to make such history singular in its representation. Rather than begin from a history of inclusion and representation, I begin with exclusion and what exceeds these binaristic representations of gender to consider what it is to move between being unseen and overseen, between invisibility and hypervisibility, through a study of written scholarship and artwork. Who is the *we* that constitutes the women's movement? What is it to escape the hegemonic logic of that we, to be in excess of its representations? What kinds of knowledge does the study of an "archive" beyond the written, historical archive produce? What futurities do fugitive movements conjure?

The ongoing, never-completed project of Stuart Hall's "living archive" provides me with a place to begin my study, which I was introduced to through the work of the artist, dancer and choreographer Julie Tolentino.[369] Tolentino's work extends Hall's

[369] Stuart Hall, "Constituting an Archive," *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (Spring 2001): 89-92.

concept through her theorization of the body as archive.[370] Hall's methodological approach prioritizes a continuous, unfinished, and open-ended nature, in which "living" breathes life into the mortuary of "tradition," rendering "archival collections" as graveyards of the past. Tolentino's ongoing serial performance *The Sky Remains the Same* (2008—Present) continues this interrogation by disrupting the separation of subject and object, self and other, history and memory, event and archive, as well as the impulse to capture and kill that often undergirds institutional collecting impulses which take the life out of the objects in their hold. I contend that scholarship that smooths out the difficult relationship between historical fact and lived experience, between social life and dead archives—that assumes that the disparate politics of the women who participated in both "secular" and "Islamist" women's movements abided by the bounds of these categorical boxes— reproduces the very violence of the hegemonic logic it hopes to critique through a demand for representational transparency. To look in "the record" for what is solely "on record" for representable forms of difference is to miss what Anjali Arondekar calls the "recursive traces" of forms of life and concealed differences that were contained within and constitutive of these historical movements and archives.[371] I am arguing here that it is possible to mistake what is concealed or

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[370] Julie Tolentino, *The Sky Remains the Same* (2008—Present). Tolentino's work is cited as a theorization akin to written scholarship. See also André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal,* Vol. 42, no.2 (WInter 2010): 28-48; Tara Hart, "How Do You Archive the Sky?" *Archive Journal,* November 2015, https://www.archivejournal.net/essays/how-do-you-archive-the-sky/.

[371] Arondekar, *For The Record*.

what is unseen with absence. I contend that Lala Rukh's artwork escapes both the categories of modern secular and religious tradition that constrain hegemonic scholarship and feminist discourse of this period, as well as the modern binary representations of gender that were introduced and codified into law under the British Raj. Lala Rukh's artwork opens onto a fugitive movement and a trace that offers us other futurities and relationships to the past.

The Hudood Ordinances are part of a revisionist project that perceives the persistence of British colonial law, which remained largely intact after partition and independence, as a continuation of the violence of colonialism, in which reclamation involved restituting the law "back" to a perceived "tradition." In the case of Pakistan, this involved conjuring an Islamic present as if it was a continuous, uninterrupted thread extending back to an imagined temporality of a traditional "before" that preceded British colonialism and the imposition of Anglo-Indian law. This took the form of an invocation of a particular sect of Islamic law, a Sunni Hanafi madhab (jurisprudence) that has adopted influences of the Salafist movement, a literalist doctrine.[372] This conception of a binaristic relationship between secular modernity and religious tradition is part of a modality of what Edward Said defines as "Orientalism," a binary which Talal Asad troubles further through the lens of translation studies in his genealogy of "religion." Asad argues that religion is itself a category that emerged out

[372] Pakistan's new constitution was introduced under the government of Ayub Khan on August 14, 1973, which shifted the debates around the state's constitutional and political framework. See Toor, *The State of Islam*.

of Christian, European modernity that is used to justify liberal politics and cautions against its application as a universal concept, particularly to "translate" Islamic beliefs and practices.[373]

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that Orientalism consists of a body of theory and practice, "a mode of discourse" with material investments that include "supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles."[374] Orientalism is defined as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'" It corresponds roughly to (a constantly shifting) East and (relatively stable) West that inheres in the imaginary of the colonizer and colonized subjects, who at times re-reproduce it in the postcolonial quest for authenticity and tradition. Said's analysis of Orientalism also troubles the idea of a Euro-American secularism that is neatly opposed to religion. He contends that "religious patterns of human history in European culture" themselves were not eliminated but in fact persisted from the 18th century onwards in their "secular" cultural logics: "They were reconstituted, redeployed, redistributed in the secular frameworks just enumerated" he contends, in which Orientalism functions for the Occident as a site of "reconstructed religious impulse."[375] Said warns against Orientalism's "formidable structure of cultural

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[373] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 5.

[374] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 9-10.

[375] Ibid., 121.

domination and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others."[376] If "imperialism is the export of identity," what forms must undoing, or decolonizing, identity require for colonized subjects?

Aamir Mufti riffs off Said and traces non-Western societies' adoption of Orientalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Speaking about the Indian subcontinent's fissures he writes:

> In this sense both religious and secular traditions in the modern era—the Arab tradition and Islamic orthodoxy, for instance, or Indian civilization and Hinduism—are products of the Orientalist conjuncture and, far from excluding the religious, the secular complexes have themselves been produced by their anchoring in religious elements configured in majoritarian terms.[377]

I extend Said and Mufti's analyses to consider the juxtaposition of British colonial modernity as opposed to an originary Sunni Hanafi madhab in Zia's Pakistan as an example of the persistent cultural domination of Orientalism that Said and Mufti diagnose, but recalibrate their concern with the formerly colonized subject and the potentiality of "secularism" to questions of decolonization and the possibility of what Vijay Prashad adopts from Frantz Fanon's invocation of the Third World—an

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[376] Ibid., 33.

[377] Aamir Mufti, "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (Spring 2010), 464.

international network and political project not bound to the confines of the nation-state.[378]

Scholars such as Naveeda Khan and Shahab Ahmed provide a counterpoint to studies of Islam that rely on legal interpretation and Quranic exegesis by foregrounding everyday life and an ensemble of practices that are open-ended and heterogeneous, reading texts such as poetry and Urdu literature and even jokes.[379] Ahmed refuses the binaries of religious and secular, as well as religion and culture, sacred and profane, and even Islamic and Islamicate, and offers us a "coherently contradictory" concept instead, that echoes Khan insofar as it is about becoming or "meaning-making" as open-ended exploration, although he limits his analysis to semiotic and communicative terms of "language" and neglects embodiment completely. Drawing from the methods of such scholarship while thinking through embodiment beyond essentialized literary textuality, I return to the possibility of a futurity that the era of decolonization promised by foregrounding a concern with the social life of women, everyday life, and the city, which animated so much of Lala Rukh's activism, pedagogy, and art. I will demonstrate the ways in which her disruption of the logic of the law and its gendered prohibitions, at the very site of its impossibility, enacts a translation of what Moten refers to as a "fugitive movement," whose relation "to law is reducible neither to simple interdiction

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[378] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 314; Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations*.

[379] Naveeda Khan, *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Ahmed, *What is Islam?*.

nor bare transgression."[380] I understand this event as performing a disruption whose movement I will track throughout Lala Rukh's career, not as a negative response but a refusal that produces a pluralized ontology of the gaze or nazar that is not constructed by sexual difference or binary gender, and that centers the problem of the "feminine" as a subject of representation and object of desire in postcolonial modernist aesthetics across South Asia.[381]

Ungendering Nazar / Ungendering the Gaze

Every day a young man arrived at Lala Rukh's house in Gulberg and began modeling, changing his pose frequently. Lala Rukh sketched him quickly with conté on rag paper and in very few marks succeeded in capturing the model's dynamic poses.[382] In these figure drawings we can clearly see the artist's investment in the quality of the line work—there is no volumetric shading of the body, no interest in mass. Instead, sparse, attenuated, curvilinear lines flit across the large unmarked expanses of the paper's positive space. *Drawing series (2)* (1970), for example, consists not of one long, languorous line that traces the bent back of the model from neck to buttocks, but is comprised of five short, broken lines that vary in thickness even from a single line's head to its tail. Although these curved lines never touch, the lively marks delineate the

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[380] Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 179.

[381] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of the Woman," in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 186.

[382] Conté are square sticks made of charcoal or powdered graphite mixed with wax or clay and also called conté crayons or conté sticks. What is called rag paper here is also called newsprint.

pulsing bend of the back and the body's lean musculature. Lala Rukh manipulated the conté stick deftly in her hands, so that the same mark transitioned from a thick to a thin edge in a single, short stroke. These variegated lines gently corral positive space into clustered contours that begin to intimate the congealment of a bodily form through the positive space of the page, through the tension of what is not rendered that lies pulsing between the lines.

In a similar figure drawing series from the '80s, the outline of the figure of the body is now barely even legible (fig. 41 and 42). The viewer's eye works to locate the contour of an arched back expressed in a few marks—an arm hanging down and a leg lend support to the figure, and to the viewer recognizing it as a figure drawing. Now with even fewer sinuous lines, the body is a ghostly presence upon the page, as if the artist is dissolving or disappearing the body while remaining interested in the abstract quality of the line, unmoored from its observational descriptor but still tethered to concepts such as gravity, with the lines intimating legs and arms falling down towards the ground. While the artist completed thousands of these figure drawings from 1977 through 1989, only a few remain in public circulation, such as these that were belatedly titled *Drawing Series*.[383]

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[383] These drawings are part of the estate of Lala Rukh and include two sets of drawings, one from the 1970s and one from the 1980s; all are conté on paper with the dimensions 73.66 cm x 55.88 cm (30 in. x 22 in.). Grey Noise, *Lala Rukh—Portfolio*, 2018. I suspect that the date of 1970 is incorrect and is in fact meant to be the 1970s, begun by the artist on her return from Chicago in 1977, and not before she left Lahore in the early 1970s. The artist states as much in her own words in Hashmi, "Lala Rukh," *Unveiling the Visible*, 128.

FIGURE 41. LALA RUKH, *DRAWING SERIES* (1980S)

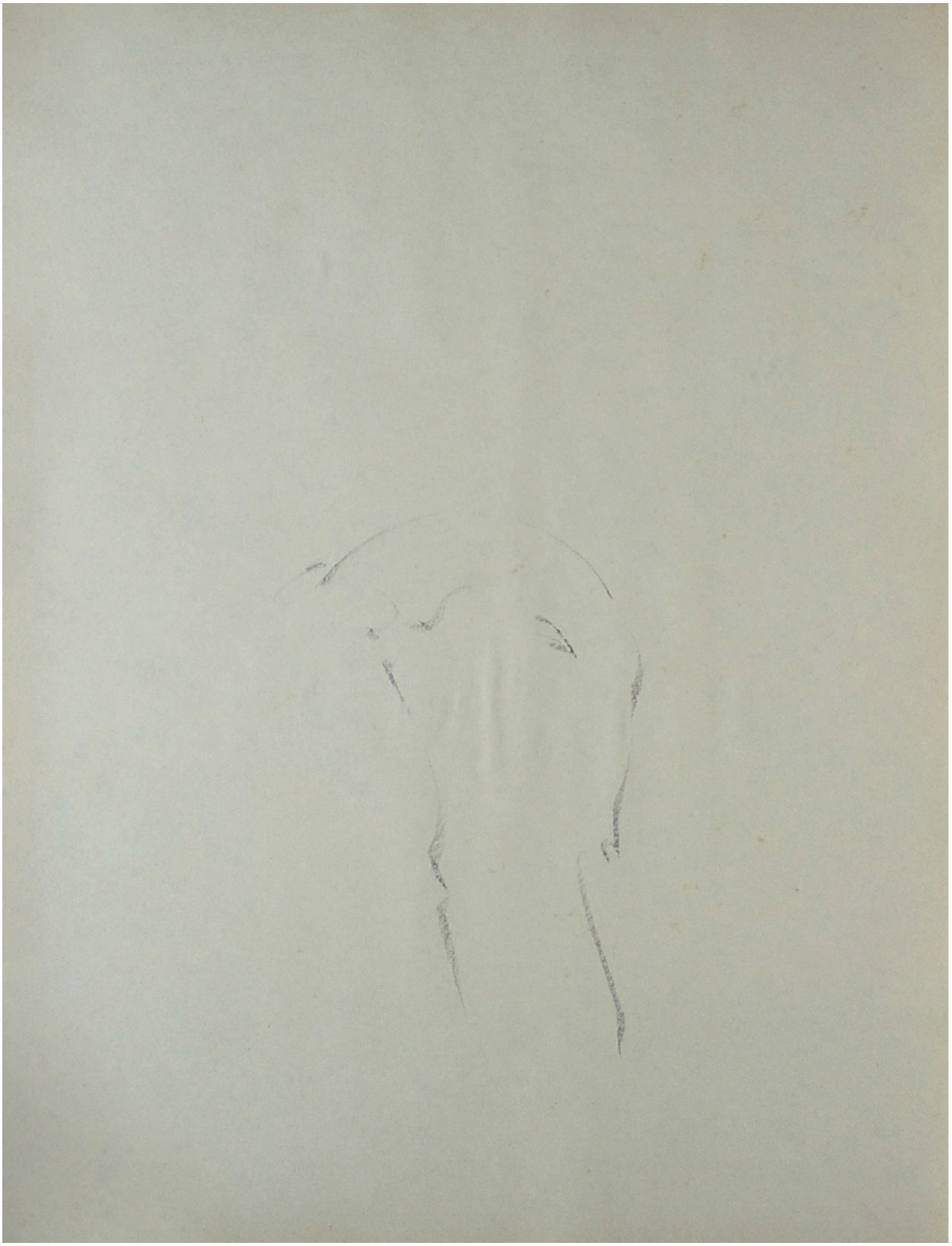

FIGURE 42. LALA RUKH, *DRAWING SERIES* (1980S)

Why didn't the artist choose to draw a nude woman in her studio during those early days of martial law? Had Lala Rukh decided to do so, her actions would have registered plainly and identifiably as feminist. Given the passage of recent legislation regarding the dress code for women who worked in government offices, and women's testimony being equivalent to half that of a man, figure drawings of a nude woman would have been seen as reclamations of the woman's body and the right to represent it by an artist who was situating it beyond the tropes of objectification and eroticization. Lala Rukh would also claim the right of a woman to draw a woman's body nude, where a woman drawing a nude woman does not reproduce the patriarchal gaze of a man drawing a woman, while also refusing the prohibition on nude figure drawing outright. Yet the artist instead chose a less legible gesture, representing the body with what Naiyer Masud describes as "dimness" and Edouard Glissant calls "the right to opacity."[384] Glissant theorizes transparency as a demand placed upon the colonized by the colonizer in an attempt at comprehension of its minority subjects through comparison. Glissant writes, "If we examine this process of 'understanding' people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce."[385] Drawing from Glissant,

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[384] Glissant, *Poetics Of Relation*.

[385] Ibid., 189-90.

Natalie Melas also argues against comparative equivalences by thinking through figures of incommensurability in literary and theoretical texts across phases of colonialism, postcolonialism, and neocolonialism, arguing that "a similarity constituted as difference from difference can never coalesce into a standard and therefore produce a measurement by comparison."[386] She pays particular attention to the problem that inheres to the category of "woman" itself.[387] This "intercommunal difference of gender" that is not necessarily categorized as "feminine or feminist response" also animates my work.[388]

Lala Rukh's decision to draw a man could also be read as a reactive tactic, one that reverses the gendered logic of objectification. If the woman's body had been objectified in the history of art by the male gaze, here the opposite gesture is enacted in which a man is represented through the gaze of the "woman artist." I argue that Lala Rukh's drawings are not reactive, made in response to the representations of women's bodies in the work of postcolonial modernist or anti-colonial movements across South Asia. Furthermore, her multi-media works on paper bear no resemblance to the style of figural representations of oil painting that dominated Punjab University where Lala Rukh studied and later taught, epitomized by the Punjab school of landscape painting.

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[386] See Natalie Melas, "Versions of Incommensurability," *World Literature Today* 69, no. 2 (Spring, 1995): 278-79.

[387] See Natalie Melas, *All The Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006): xi.

[388] Ibid., 127.

Lastly, they do not show the male figure in a manner that decries the power imbued in "masculinity" within a patriarchal system by debasing it through abjection or the grotesque. In all these examples I give, I contend that the artist's work exceeds the opposition of man/woman, figural/abstract, and tradition/modernity.

The flatness and attentiveness to the khat (line), characteristic of Lala Rukh's drawings, are part of an aesthetic tradition in the region influenced by early modern Chinese and Indo-Persian scrolls, manuscript illustrations, and woodblock prints. Miniature paintings were not initially framed paintings on walls, they were "illuminations" of the written page, kept in books and later loose papers that were part of muraqqas (albums), compendiums of works held together in folio. In their interaction with colonial modes of painting these works shifted; they were torn from folios and sold individually, and then painters began painting portraits approximating those of colonial oil painting, but still on paper with water-based pigments. These paintings retained their fidelity to the book, they were oriented vertically, included borders, and sometimes included calligraphic text alongside the image. The artwork consisted of ink on paper or water-based paints on handmade paper, that were layered in washes with delicate brushes used to apply line work atop these washes, as well as a technique of building the surface up with small dots, or stippling (nuqta kaari). In Indo-Persian paintings the rendering of rocks, plants, clouds and other non-human animals were given as much care as the humans who populated the page. Hierarchies in

representation existed, the scale of a person indicated their importance in relation to other figures on the page, and animals were not represented in the same manner as humans and were often shown at service of humans.

Prior to British colonial modernity, beauty and femininity were attributes used to describe both men and women as desirous objects across South and West Asia. Afsaneh Najmabadi's work on visual representations and modernity in Iran demonstrates the ways in which gendered notions of beauty changed during the Qajar dynasty in the 19th century through interactions with Western nation-states.[389] Najmabadi outlines the ways in which binary gendered tropes displaced early modern notions of gender and sexuality in Persia, particularly representations of "male-male loving couples," the feminization of beauty, and of the emergence of a fraternal nation and homeland as feminine object.[390] Similarly, across early modern South Asia, in Sufi vernacular allegories, Hindi-Urdu and Indo-Persian poetry, and miniature painting, the figure of the beloved also resided in this realm of premodern gender and sexualities beyond a heteroerotic logic with its gendered binaries. In Indo-Persian poetry, there is an ambiguous gendered relation between the ashiq (lover) and mashooq (beloved); this amorous relationship is rendered opaquely to maintain a distinction between worldly love and love of God, in which human beauty can also be read as a manifestation of the beauty of God, on the one hand. The trope also veils explicit representations of women

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[389] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*.

[390] Ibid., 26.

FIGURE 43. REZA ABBASI, *GEORGIAN PRINCE MUHAMMAD-BEK* (1620)

in the poetic forms of the ghazal, on the other, while simultaneously accommodating same sex relations such as pederasty, or amrad-parasti (boy-love),which was, prior to the 19th century, a socio-sexual convention.[391]

While scholars such as C.M. Naim and Tariq Rahman name same-sex relation as "homosexuality" in English, naming it as such seems to fix the postcolonial condition within Western, colonial epistemologies, tying it too closely to British colonial prohibitions against "homosexuality." In the context of British colonial India, this referred to the regulation of sexuality with the passage of Section 377 (1861) in the Indian Penal code, which forbade "unnatural acts" such as same-sex relation or sexual relations outside of state sanctioned marriages, which postcolonial India, Pakistan, and many other former British colonies inherited after independence. For this reason, I will not refer to homosexuality here but instead to same-sex relation, without explicit reference to a heterosexual relation between the ashiq and mashooq, lover and beloved.

The beloved remained unspecified in the ghazal or rekhta, as the ghazal was called in the early modern period. Although the beloved, or mashooq, was grammatically gendered male, this was not meant to match a particularly gendered subject, instead it was meant to offer the beloved the respect of a veiled utterance, their

[391] Amrad parasti refers to pederasty and refers to the relationship between an elderly man and a young boy who retains the sexual ambiguity of a pubescent or pre-pubescent youth. In ancient Greece and Rome the term for this was catamite and had overtures that were age-specific and referred to the perception of active and passive positions in same-sex sexual relations, in which the younger boy was perceived as passive and the elder as active.

visage obscured through an occluded representational language akin to "dimness."[392] In addition to the rekhta, which was written in an assumed male voice primarily by male poets using the male grammar for both lover and beloved, there was also the rekhti form, a genre of ghazal in the "voice" of women that was written almost exclusively by men. The rekhti was popularly considered as a titillating erotic genre of lesser literary status than the rekhta, and in it the gender of the beloved was made explicit.[393] The vernacular practice of this protective tradition of concealed articulation through the elision of gendered specificity, which does not locate the object with clarity but instead with obfuscation, continues to be practiced vernacularly across South Asia and the diaspora (as well as in Urdu poetry) such as when young women are given names associated with men so that when they are called by name they are veiled from desire and the evil eye. The recurrence of these practices in literary tropes lends Hindi-Urdu and Indo-Persian poetry a richness due to its many possible meanings that index love between humans as well as love for God.

This gender ambiguity is deftly employed and even more thickly rendered by Indo-Persian poets, who embraced what the opacity permitted as the object of desire underneath the cover of literary conventions and social mores, which also permitted a

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[392] Naiyer Masud speaks about dimness in terms of how he renders time and space, which I draw from and apply to visuality in the artwork of Lala Rukh. See Asif Farrukhi, "A Conversation with Naiyer Masud," 267-268.

[393] See C.M. Naim, "Homosexual (Pederastic) Love in Pre-Modern Urdu Poetry," *Urdu Texts and Contexts* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004): 19-41; C.M. Naim, "Transvestic Words? The *Rekhti* in Urdu," *Urdu Texts and Contexts* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004): 42-66; Saleem Kidvai and Ruth Vanita ed., *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings in Indian Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

wide range of readers to engage with, understand and enjoy the poetry in distinct ways. While literature permits us to imagine an innumerable set of roles for the lover and the beloved, visual culture in Indo-Persian miniature specifies more particular forms of beauty through depictions of nubile youths. In the 17th century portrait of *Georgian prince Muhammad-Bek* (1620, fig. 43) by the painter Reza Abbasi, for example, the posture of the beautiful young prince echoes that of the plant tendrils behind him, sinuous, leaning at an angle, his hands folded delicately, his face free of any facial hair. There is a softness conveyed in the portrait that is part of what is celebrated openly about the prince's beauty, and which is inseparable from femininity. Abbasi was a highly regarded early modern artist of the Isfahan school, known for his portraits of nubile youths in paint and ink on paper.[394]

In the context of modern South Asia, the tradition of what Iftikhar Dadi articulated as "Muslim modernism" in the 19th century similarly entailed a break with pre-modern gender/sexual depictions from prior traditions of painting. The artist Chughtai, whose delicate line work drew from South and West Asian traditions such as Mughal painting, offers us an example of the ways in which femininity came to be expressed solely through the figure of the woman as an object of desire, in which the mashooq was now synonymous with woman. Dadi observes that "figurative work, especially in the case of the female figure, was seen not from the viewpoint of realism

[394] Barbara Brend, *Islamic Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[for Chughtai] but from woman identified as the symbol of the beloved of the *ghazal,* who is not a realist or bodily figure but an 'other,' a sum of symbols and metaphors, totally self-absorbed and indifferent, even sadistic, in inducing madness and ecstasy in the poet."[395] Chughtai also subscribed to the "essential difference between Western art and oriental art" an exemplary, early form of self-orientalism that revolves around question of authenticity, a topic that also preoccupied Urdu criticism by literary figures such as Muhammad Hasan Askari and Intizar Husain.[396] Chughtai's encounter with Europe was fraught with insecurity, and his response was self-orientalism and Mughal nostalgia, which represented "the degree to which resistance to colonialism for Chughtai was also only possible by accepting its terms, indeed by further asserting difference."[397] Dadi argues that Chughtai's work did differ from Iqbal's "masculinist vitalism" due to the level of beauty and refinement in his paintings that the critic Tasir argued had "a much greater sense of femininity [nisa'iyat]" than "masculine traits [mardana ausaf]."[398] I argue that Tasir takes for granted a modern gender binary and objectification of women that Chughtai's work underscores in "the centrality of the female figure," its association with the mashooq, and the associations of the woman's

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[395] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia,* 83.

[396] Ibid., 84; Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 15-18.

[397] Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia,* 82-84; 87.

[398] Ibid., 88.

body in South Asia with the land and tradition.[399] This is distinct from the various visual representations of the beloved in Mughal and Persian miniature, which included representations of femininity in both men and women. Chughtai exemplifies the transition towards an alignment of beauty and femininity within a modern gender binary in which the mashooq (beloved) of the ashiq (lover) was now the heteroerotic woman.[400]

Lala renders a man with delicate lines, with femininity (nisa'iyat). This is distinct from rendering a woman delicately. Lala Rukh expressed her dislike for Chughtai in her Master's thesis at the University of Chicago, as he did render women delicately, which Lala Rukh read as his eroticization of women. Lala's wavy, sinuous lines may also be described by what Deleuze describes as "the figural," a representation that is anti-mimetic that moves beyond the "figurative, illustrative and narrative" and operates instead in the realm of sensation and affect—not in opposition but in excess.[401] Lala's line work therefore exceeds signification through existing modes of representation but is felt and drawn in relation to these other literary texts and art objects while also

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[399] Ibid.

[400] Dadi writes, "Salim Akhtar claimed that Chughtai's woman was not a familiar figure from everyday life but a picturization of the classical *ghazal*'s metaphors of the beloved." Ibid., 83. Afsaneh Najmabadi's writing about early modern Persia observes "gender as a binary has since become a template for categories of modern sexuality. Our contemporary binary of gender translates any fractures of masculinity into effeminization. Nineteenth-century Iranian culture, however, had other ways of naming, such as amrad (young adolescent male) and mukhannas (an adult man desiring to be an object of desire for adult men), that were not equated with effeminacy." Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 3.

[401] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation,* transl. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Cotinuum, 2003): 34-36.

returning to early modern conceptions of gender/sexuality that elude the colonial gaze and its production of an errant homosexuality as the only language for the myriad expressions of non-heteroerotic logic.

While Lala wrote critically of Chughtai's neo-classicism and his objectification of women in his work, *formally* her line work has much in common with Chughtai's aesthetics and his citation of the line, or khat, drawn from Indo-Persian painting.[402] His interest in the lyricism of the line and an investment in drawing was distinct from the interest in volume and mass by modernist painters across South Asia invested in the brush stroke. We can see such preoccupations in the oil paintings of Zubeida Agha and Shakir Ali as well as M.F. Husain, Akbar Padamsee, and Tyeb Mehta. Drawing was not a site of stable renewal of tradition of an East against a stable West for Lala Rukh, as it was for Chughtai. While she drew from Mughal and Persian miniature traditions, she also drew from observation, breaking with Chughtai's division of observational drawing as Western and imaginative form as Eastern. Lala Rukh also incorporated experimental dark room photography into her layered process-based drawings in which she employed miniature techniques and its fine hair brushes, working laboriously at a small scale with a limited palette of white and silver paint atop delicate black photo paper, which she exposed in the dark room in her *River in an Ocean* series. In her serial artwork, I argue that Lala Rukh was not trying to reconnect with Mughal

[402] Lala Rukh, "Advertisements," in *Re-inventing Women: The Portrayal of Women in the Media—the Zia Years*, ed. Neelam Hussain, Nasrene Shah, Ferida Sher, Lala Rukh (Lahore: Simorgh Collective, 1996): 66-78.

classicism, but sought to create an epistemological break with British colonial historicism through developing a technique of mark making that might produce a new way of looking, one that both decolonized the colonial aesthetic traditions that she was trained in yet enacted a promiscuity in the references and traditions it brought together, all the while breaking from the heterosexist, patriarchal gaze of Muslim modernity. Lala Rukh remade traditional masculinist forms such as calligraphy, in which she inverted the figure and ground relation, and "queers" the 'Alif, the erect line, in her seascapes. In all the works she combines methods, drawing Mughal and Persian miniature techniques together with new media and observational drawing alongside the literary tropes of the mashooq in the ghazal with an affective impulse.

Chaadar Aur Char Diwaari: Femininity and Small Acts

In the hierarchy of arts in post-independence Pakistan, small works on paper were considered, along with water-based miniature painting and printmaking, secondary to oil painting—they were feminized.[403] While she was a committed women's movement activist, Lala Rukh's work bore little relation to the feminist art practices of other women of her generation. Lala Rukh did not "challenge the male gaze," nor did her artwork contain explicitly political content, despite her central role in the women's movement and in the horizontal, grass-roots activism as a co-founder of

[403] Painting referred to works executed on canvas or board. For more on the secondary status of works associated with feminization, see Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 9-12.

WAF.[404] The radicality of Lala Rukh's work lies in the fact that she centers the question of the gaze, refusing binaries of looking and objectification (activity and passivity) that map onto gendered binaries of active/man and passive/woman, or active/man and passive/emasculated/feminized/boy. Lala Rukh's work avoids what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls the "founding of a hysterocentric to counter a phallocentric discourse" while her gaze expresses "a non-coercive rearrangement of desire" that moves beyond Spivak's articulation of the problem of the voice in representation to a desirous subject, and at that, beyond its articulation only in English.[405]

Lala's critical analysis of representations of women in her writing help to situate her political outlook as a feminist activist. In *Reinventing Women: Representation of Women in the Media During The Zia Years,* Lala Rukh writes that women's representations in advertisements and cinema hoardings are "blatantly sexist and stereotypical" and observes "the objective of these images is to define the relationship of the male spectator with the female body, encouraging voyeurism, fetishism and exhibitionism through the display of the female body as a sex object."[406] Lala Rukh's argument echoes psychoanalytically inflected feminist writing, such as that of the film critic Laura

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[404] Ibid.

[405] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Postcolonial literature*. Paper presented at the Graduate Seminars on Postcolonial literature, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong (July 2002); Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of the Woman," 184; Sarah Eleazar, "Teachers must get to know students and then learn how to teach them: Spivak," *The Express Tribune*, October 26, 2014, https://tribune.com.pk/story/781113/teachers-must-get-to-know-students-and-then-learn-how-to-teach-them-spivak.

[406] Lala Rukh, "Advertisements," 76.

Mulvey. In "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," Mulvey argues that the male gaze is projected upon the woman as image, "as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man," within the patriarchal order.[407] In the narrative structure of Pakistani films, Lala explains, two fundamental types of woman are represented, the good domestic wife, who remains within the confines of the home, and the "other" woman who ventures outside it.[408] The relationship of privacy and interiority with respectability, and publicity and exteriority with the illicit rendered the woman's body as it entered public space a transgressive charge. Both Lala Rukh and Mulvey equate the male gaze with control and possession, the active gaze of the man who looks at a passive object, the woman.[409] The questionable universality of "woman" is challenged by bell hooks in her essay "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Spectatorship." Mulvey, hooks argues, conflates "woman" in her essay with the "white woman" and omits any discussion of the representations of Black women in the American films she examines. hooks problematizes totalizing categories such as "woman" that efface difference, where "sex/sexuality may not be the primary and/or exclusive signifier of difference."[410] While

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[407] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 843.

[408] Lala Rukh, "Advertisements," 77-78.

[409] "In a world ordered by sexual imbalances," Mulvey continues, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female." Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 837.

[410] hooks writes: "Black female spectators, who refused to identify with white womanhood, who would not take on the phallocentric gaze of desire and possession, created a critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posts of 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look' was continually deconstructed." bell hooks, ""The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 124.

hooks does foreground race and oppositional spectatorship, she does not consider a woman's gaze in excess of the male/female split of subject/object.[411] If we leave aside the question of the male gaze projected upon the woman's body for a moment, what about the possibility of a woman's gaze? And what of a woman's gaze that is not looking back at a man but creating a field of signification outside of it? What other representations might a woman's gaze produce in a method of "looking" that is not possessive?

I contend that Lala Rukh's *work* performs a resignification of the politics of the gaze linked to nazar. Lala Rukh's *actions* were simultaneously radically oppositional to the passage of laws in Pakistan that reduced a woman's testimony to half that of a man —*ek aurat, ek gawahi* (one woman, one testimony) reads one calligraphic feminist poster the artist produced, protesting the law of testimony (fig. 44). In this context, the possibility of a counter-hegemonic woman's gaze was beyond the purview of the law as it was not even considered whole. Lala Rukh located herself precisely in this space of impossibility and played with the patriarchal paradigm of active/male and passive/female that defines representations of women not only in media and film but also in visual art, in which it is the woman's eroticized body that dominates masculinist modernism across South Asia while gendered, symbolic tropes arise in some work by women artists. Lala Rukh displaced the male gaze with the woman's gaze. She rendered

[411] Ibid.

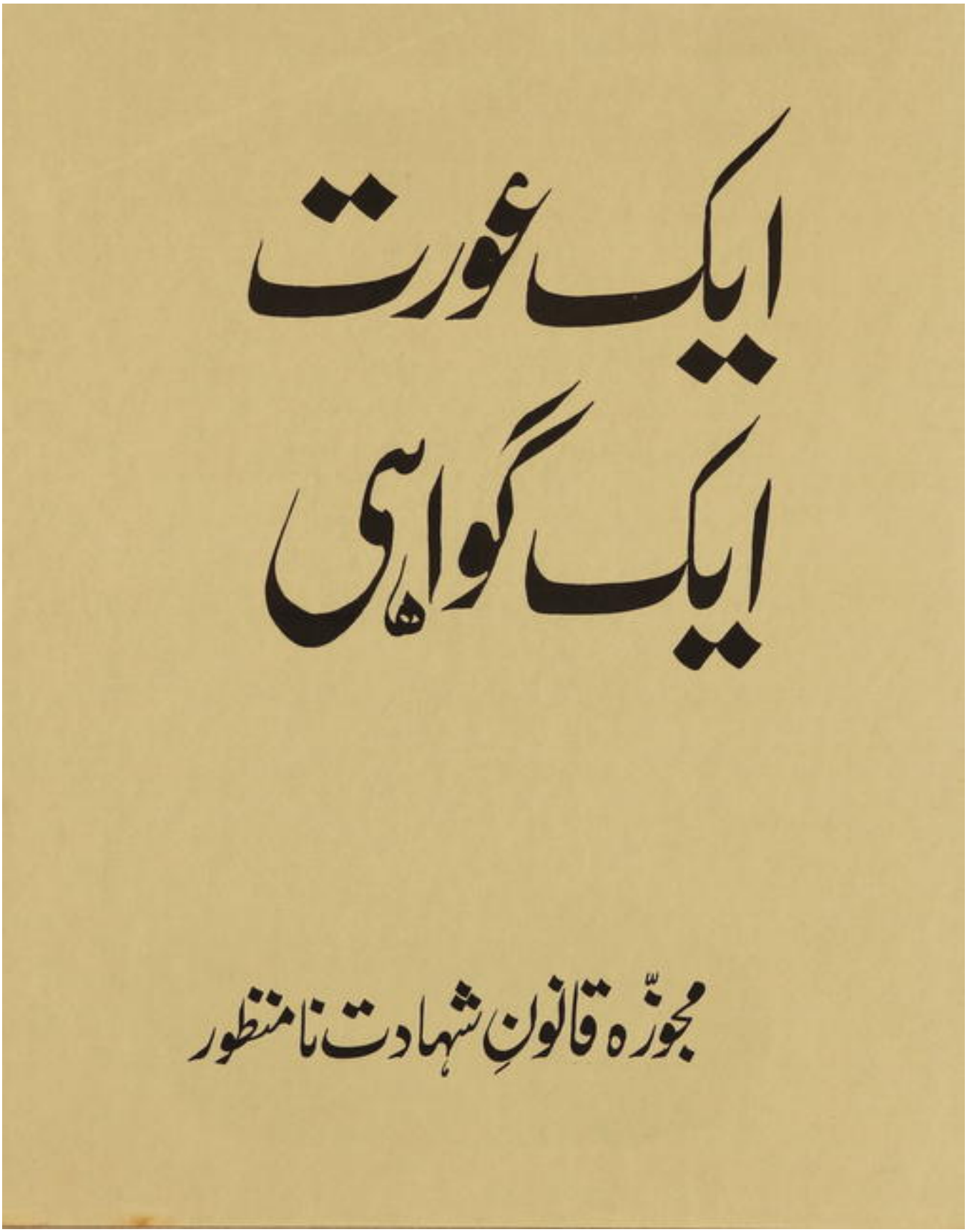

FIGURE 44. LALA RUKH, *EK AURAT, EK GAWAHI (ONE WOMAN, ONE TESTIMONY)*, WOMEN'S ACTION FORUM POSTER (1983)

the man's body through sensuous line work, through a delicacy and femininity that were, at the time, relegated to representations of the woman's body alone. And while these figure drawings are not making a "political" argument through their representation, they refuse the masculinist scale and medium of what constitutes "artwork" and remain interested in exploring the formal qualities of the line. These drawings are in fact studies in how to see in an epistemological sense; they are not studies in feminist strategies of receiving-and-returning the male gaze, and as such they exceed the categories of both the feminine and the masculine while articulating a representation in excess of both and either.

Layta Hua Khat / The Alif in a Dramatic Dip[412]

The river wears its skin of light
—Agha Shahid Ali[413]

Calligraphy and landscape painting were the state-sanctioned aesthetic forms under Zia, aesthetic forms which male modernist painters, who were accused of complicity with military rule, employed. While Salima Hashmi observes that "not a single woman artist took up calligraphy or changed her mode of working to bring it in line with official State policy," Lala Rukh did in fact work with calligraphy, leveraging it against the hegemonic modes of calligraphic practice that were patronized by the state, such as the late work of Sadequain, along with landscape painting, which was

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412 "Layta hua khat" literally translates to reclining line, but it is better translated into English for the purposes of my argument as the alif in a dramatic dip, which references an element of vogue ballroom dance that is incorrectly referred to as a "death drop." In the dip, although the body and back are arched backwards with on leg bent underneath and another pointed, the arms spread, the back *never* touches the ground. Voguing evolved out of the ballroom dance cultures of African American and Latinx drag queens, gay men and gender nonconforming people in the 1980s and was brought into mainstream American culture through RuPaul's Drag Race. Gender understood as performance was theorized by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* although it is arguable that theorization occurred in the ballroom dance scene, although it was written with the body instead of words, an idea of "the body as archive," which I draw from Julie Tolentino's writing and performance work including *The Sky Remains the Same* and *Slipping Into Darkness* (2019). See Julie Tolentino, *slipping into darkness* (New York: Performance Space, 2019); André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 28-48. Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* includes a chapter on the film *Paris is Burning* (1990) by Jennie Livingston, which documents the ballroom dance scene and house culture in New York City in the 1980s. bell hooks has questioned Livingston's voyeuristic gaze, as a white, middle-class, genderqueer lesbian, which renders the balls as spectacle, compared to Marlon Riggs' film *Tongues Tied*, in which the individuals are able to reflect on the world of family and community beyond the drag ball. See: bell hooks, "Is Paris Burning?" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 145-156. For more on ballroom, gender and performance, see Marlon Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013). *Duets: Kia LaBeija & Julie Tolentino in conversation* (New York: Visual AIDS, 2018); Kia LaBeija, "Kia LaBeija, as told to Alex Fialho," *ArtForum* (January 2018); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2006); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011): 81-98; *Paris is Burning*, directed by Jennie Livingston (1990; Toronto: Off-White Productions).

413 Agha Shahid Ali, "Of Light," *Poetry* (May 2001), 79.

considered a glorification of the nation-state through its celebration of its landscape.[414] Despite this, or in spite of this, calligraphy and landscape painting were technically the two genres Lala Rukh chose to work with, reworking them in style and incorporating new media such as photography, printmaking, and early modern techniques like burnishing drawn from miniature painting, which gave her drawings in graphite an almost reflective sheen. Lala also appropriated calligraphy and redeployed it in representations of illegible writing in her serial work *Hieroglyphs*, which I argue are representations of non-utterance. The title alludes to a pictographic script, although Lala's sinuously shaped, wavy lines running across the middle of each page are redolent with hidden meaning, indecipherable to the viewer—but not indecipherable to the lover signaled in the work, or the recipient of the text, their beloved. The subtitle after *Hieroglyphs* is "koi ashiq kisi mehbooba se," an oft recited line from a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz—"some lover to some beloved."

The artist was not alone in her interest in calligraphy in South Asia and, particularly, in post-independence Pakistan. Prior to Zia's military rule, artists such as Zahoor ul Akhlaq had also interrogated the form, as had Shakir Ali and Anwar Jalal Shemza, who all employed calligraphy through modes of abstraction, while retaining an ambivalence to post-colonial nationalism. Ali, Shemza, and ul Akhlaq, explored the surface of the painting through color, pattern and texture, whereas Lala Rukh's works

[414] Salima Hashmi, "Lala Rukh," *Unveiling the Visible*, 8. See also Naqvi, *Image & Identity*, 197-199.

on paper, in black and white, are invested in the line and literariness, entangled with questions of aurality/orality, translation and untranslatability. Despite these distinct approaches to figure and ground and an investment in the line versus mass, all the artists were invested in space and affect and connecting post-independence or postcolonial artistic movements with pre-modern aesthetics, including traditions from calligraphy and Mughal miniature painting, explorations of flatness, geometry, and surface, which were also constitutive of the abstract work of Euro-American post-war modernist movements.[415]

Iftikhar Dadi locates the movement of the Pakistani state towards forms such as calligraphy to Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's "Islamic socialism" of the '70s, and notes that artists' interest in calligraphy predates this by decades, within a larger historical movement of calligraphic modernism in the post-independence era across the global south—from Sudan to Iraq, Iran and Pakistan to Bangladesh—that began in the '50s.[416] Dadi observes:

> Between 1955 and 1975, artists from North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia reworked calligraphic motifs in entirely new ways. Earlier attitudes toward classical

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[415] Dadi notes that for Shemza "among the lessons he learned from Klee was the importance of *surface* as the plane of modernist experimentation rather than a stress on modelling, and the freedom and ability to deploy abstraction, geometry, and pattern—much of it derived from Islamic art towards modernist exploration." Dadi, "Anwar Jalal Shemza," 2.

[416] Dadi observes: "Starting in the late 1960s, Sadequain increasingly turned to pure Quranic calligraphy, a direction that received great impetus in the mid-1970s, beginning with the 'Islamic socialism' of Z. A. Bhutto and continuing on in the regime of General Zia ul-Haq…. His later work, as exemplary of an overtly 'Islamic' art, was pressed into ideological service of Bhutto's government and the regime of General Zia ul-Haq, the promoter of Islamization in Pakistan at the state level since the late 1970s." Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 73.

> calligraphy were not only decisively modified, but genres such as portraiture and still life were also reshaped by a renewed concern with the abstract and expressive possibilities of the Arabic script.[417]

The interest in pre-colonial forms of aesthetic practice which were outside the domain of Western aesthetics, found in muraqqa (manuscripts) and architectural reliefs, fueled a variety of artistic movements in newly independent nations that had relationships to Arabic, Urdu, or Persian script. In Pakistan, the celebrated artist Sadequain, who Lala Rukh admired and paid tribute to in her Master's Thesis at Chicago, had also turned towards calligraphy before it was co-opted by the state.[418] Sadequain benefitted immensely from support under Zia and was commissioned by the state to execute numerous public murals.[419]

During Zia's government, most state commissions went to male artists who were practicing calligraphy and landscape painting.[420] The painted tradition of idealizing

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[417] Ibid., 134.

[418] Iftikhar Dadi, "Sadequain and Calligraphic Modernism," in *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 134-176; Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*.

[419] The painter Ismail Gulgee also turned towards calligraphy in his large gestural oil canvases that drew from American Abstract Expressionism, and was also commissioned by the state to paint official portraits —his portraits of the heads of state who arrived to Lahore for the post-communist Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting in 1974 hang in the same room underneath the ceiling mural by Sadequain in Ajaib Ghar, the Lahore Museum. See also the film by Naeem Mohaiemen, *Two Meetings and a Funeral* (2017). "*Two Meetings and a Funeral* considers the historical pivot from the socialist perspective of the 1973 Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Algeria to its ideological counterpoint, the emergence of a transnational Islamic perspective at the 1974 Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting in Pakistan." *Naeem Mohaiemen: Two Meetings and a Funeral*, Art Institute of Chicago, January 11–March 31, 2019, https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/9059/naeem-mohaiemen-two-meetings-and-a-funeral.

[420] On Punjab School of landscape painting, see Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 48.

"nature as landscape" was inherited from British classical painting and colonial education and introduced to undivided, colonial India in the 18th century.[421] This style of romantic landscape painting was adopted by Lahore's "Punjab School," which celebrated the Punjab as "rural, fertile, and undisturbed."[422] Akbar Naqvi argues that this romantic rural landscape of Punjab was the Raj's invention, both "a political and military necessity."[423]

While Lala Rukh was part of the women's movement working explicitly against the Islamization of Pakistan, she reworked both genres in critical ways. It may be that her training in British art education drew her towards these forms, while her engagement with activism and the women's movement struggles against patriarchy resulted in her critical engagement with pre-colonial, early modern aesthetics. While she was a faculty member at NCA, Lala Rukh trained with a colleague who was a traditional calligrapher and drew from this training in the development of her own characteristic line work. And when she turned her attention to landscape, instead of the idealized, unpopulated agricultural land of the Punjab of Khalid Iqbal's paintings, Lala Rukh drew waterscapes, which were not part of the Punjab landscape, but instead reflected cities along the Indian Ocean, Lacadive Sea and Bay of Bengal, which she traveled to extensively throughout her life: Karachi, Goa, Colombo, and Batticaolo.

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[421] Ibid., 180.

[422] Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 8.

[423] Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 180, 184.

Lala shared with Sadequain an interest in populism and social issues, and formally, an investment in the line, what is referred to as the khat in calligraphy. Lala Rukh's posters for the women's movement also have some relationship with Sadequain's commissioned murals in that both works were meant to be encountered by a larger public rather than living in the holdings of private collectors. In Sadequain's case, he was invested in questions of labor and exploitation, and in Lala's, violence against women and discriminatory legislation against women and minorities.[424] Despite these shared interests, Lala's work breaks with Sadequain's male, modernist subjectivity and his existential formulation of self.[425] Sadequain, Dadi writes, "sought to inhabit modernity through the trope of heroic subjectivity, which the poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) had formulated."[426] This was linked to Iqbal's concept of a universal image of man alongside Sadequain's interest in men who lived transgressively.

Lala Rukh did not model herself on these masculinist modes of individuated heroic subjectivity; she forged a rich life as a woman, in the company of women. The artist's life was defined through collective organizing, resistance to discriminatory legislation and martial law, and refusal to live life within the bounds dictated by juridical frameworks and societal norms. The artist made an active decision to never marry and when she returned to Lahore from Chicago, she dropped her family surname

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[424] Ibid., 127-128.

[425] Ibid., 125-126; Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 160-162.

[426] Ibid., 135.

Khan. In both her lifelong teaching and organizing work, Lala Rukh's investment was not in individual freedom but collective liberation. She created networks of solidarity amongst women within Pakistan as well as transnationally across South Asia, in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Even teaching was within the feminized domain of reproductive labor.[427] Women were often teachers but rarely recognized as artists at the time. Hashmi observes, "Artists of the Lahore Art Circle—Anwar Jalal Shemza, Moyene Najmi, and Ahmed Pervaiz—hotly debated formalist issues, their painting echoing cubist models of the 'international style.' Not surprising, women were excluded from this discourse, which was restricted to the 'practitioners' of art, rather than the 'teachers.'"[428] The fact that many of the male artists also taught yet that it did not relegate them to being considered artists underscores this point, regarding women artists' exclusion along the lines of gender, which was further compounded by their status as educators.

Sadequain's angst and self-flagellation also did not fit within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, and although he drew from the traditions of Shi'ism and Sufism, he was derided as a khud parast or egoist. He was also celebrated by his peers,

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[427] Salima Hashmi notes that after independence, "women art educators led the foundations for the teaching of art all over Pakistan, in schools, colleges, and universities. It is therefore surprising that apart form a few well known exceptions, they were noticeably absent as practitioners.'" Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 7-8.

[428] Ibid., 8.

critics, writers, and finally, the Pakistani state.[429] Sadequain was often paid by government officials in alcohol while he was making his late, popular Quranic calligraphic work, an indication, too, that he was exploited and paid inadequately for work whose value exceeded the payments in liquor that he received. Lala's work expressed an evacuation of the self, also influenced by Sufism, and informed, too, by necessity, a logic which she carried to its extreme, dissolving the body into the ground of the page in her drawings.

Deconstructing the Phallocentrism of the Alif

The Alif, the first letter of the Urdu, Persian, and Arabic alphabet, is often situated within a logic of origin in Islamic philosophy.[430] Divine unity and oneness of God are also attributes of the Alif, which is in its form an erect line. AnneMarie Schimmel observes,

> Among the letters, it is particularly the alif [Arabic letter A], with the numerical value One, about which the Sufis speculate, and the relation of this single letter, which points to the Divine Unity and Unicity, to the first letter of the Koran, that is the ba' of the basmala with its numerical value Two, was as deeply pondered among the Sufis as the role of the [Hebrew letter B] bēth in the be-reshith [Heb. Gen. 1:1a "In the beginning..."]

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[429] Ahmadis, who were declared non-Muslim, Muslim minorities, women, and non-Muslims were not accorded the same privileges under Islamization as Sunni Muslim men under the law and in everyday life.

[430] The letter Alif cannot be connected to any letter that follows it, and is the first letter of Allah, which for Ibn Al-Arabi embodies "the suppression of any relation of affinity between God and the creatures." Aleph / Alif is also the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and has an entire symbolic and theological discourse around it.

> by the [Jewish] Cabalists, because, for the Sufis, the b, which can be united with the other letters, is the "letter of the created worlds," humble and obedient besides the unconnected "Divine" alif" [letter A].[431]

The Alif is symbolically related to the cactus for Sadequain—his depiction is of a columnar form full of thorns, a humorous play on the phallocentrism of the Alif, which he expressed an affinity with and drew repeatedly. The symbolism of the Alif was also part of African transnational movements such as the School of One (Madrasat al-Wahid).[432] Writing about the postcolonial investment in indigeneity as against the imposition of colonial logics of aesthetic practice, Salah M. Hassan observes,

> In art and literature, the response to colonialism, and to the identity crisis that colonialism created, was mostly expressed as a search for the common roots that might constitute a national culture, for a heritage of symbols, metaphors, and allegories that would transcend the ethnic tensions created by the arbitrary formations of Africa's postcolonial nation-states. This was a necessary and viable response to the unbridgeable, structurally determined gaps between a colonized society and a colonial power. Postcolonial realities required each "indigenous" social stratum to define its position in relation to the West and to other global realities, as non-Western peoples had been relegated to a position of ethnic and national particularity within a colonial framework

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[431] Annemarie Schimmel, "The Primordial Dot. Some Thoughts about Sufi Letter Mysticism," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 352.

[432] Madrasat al-Wahid was founded by the Sudanese artist Ahmad Abdul 'Al (b.1946-). In their manifesto they draw a link of their movement to new aesthetic forms, internationalism, and a historical link to "Arabic Islamic heritage." Ahmad Abdul 'Al, *The School of the One (Madrasat al-Wahid)* founding manifesto, translated by Salah M. Hassan, Smithsonian papers, 1994. See also Hassan, *Ibrahim El-Salahi and the Making of African and Transnational Modernism* (London: Tate, 2013).

> in which the West had claimed universality. This analytic framework is not an apology for the Khartoum School, but offers the only way in which its claim to create a "Sudanese" art and aesthetic can be properly understood.[433]

Lala Rukh responded to the postcolonial condition in Lahore not by looking for common roots within the frame of the newly independent nation but through a refusal of national particularity, which in the context of partition is a refusal of partition's territorial boundaries as a convergence of imaginal, ethno-racial, and national belonging. In lieu of a neo-traditional search for common roots or even transnational collectivity, the artist worked transculturally, which we also see in her activism and movement building—her work as part of WAF with other grassroots women's organizations rather than state entities, her strident refusal to take funds from non-governmental entities, and her insistence that WAF not become an NGO itself. It was with other people on the ground that Lala would work collectively and collaboratively. WAF, for example, issued the first and only apology to the people of Bangladesh for the mass rapes of Bangladeshi women committed by West Pakistani soldiers during their war of liberation in 1971.

In Lala's work, her refusal of partition was joined to a refusal of patriarchal *symbols*. I argue that she takes issue with representations of the woman's body, and the male gaze, and also that the formalism of her work takes issue with the phallocentrism

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[433] Ibid.,10.

of the figure-ground relations most evident in the Alif,[434] which Lala Rukh queers. A tension exists in using a terminology from queer studies here, as it is by and large dominated by Euro-American epistemologies and histories although it, like feminism, can be though in translation. This question of the hegemony of queer studies is particularly urgent given the end of the Cold War giving rise to the United States as a neo-imperial power, and the U.S.-led global "War on Terror's" production of a "Muslim" enemy. This racialization of a religious group homogenizes many nationalities, ethnicities, language groups, sects, castes, sexual orientations, and myriad intersectional subjectivities into the narrative of Occidentalism and Orientalism, to use Edward Said's organizational logic. Jasbir Puar describes "homonationalism" as the dual movement by which homosexual constituencies embrace nationalist agendas and are themselves embraced by the nation through the extension of rights, and in which the inclusion of predominately white subjects in the U.S. is predicated upon and distinguished from racialized "Orientalized terrorist bodies." This extends Lisa Duggan's concept of "homonormativity" and joins it to militarism and nationalism fueled by Islamophobic rhetoric, a homonationalism that is supported by a "global gay left" that condones the American imperial war machine and sees it as liberating "women" and "gays" in the "Islamic world."[435] I would argue that the War on Terror

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[434] Alif is the first letter of the Arabic, Urdu and Persian alphabet, and consists of a standing vertical line.

[435] See: Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics,* ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–194.

mobilized a liberal rights discourse through a homonationalist and feminist imperial savior logic. For example, the bombing of Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11, despite the attacks on the World Trade Center having no connection to the Taliban, was justified by mobilizing Islamophobia alongside the rhetoric of the liberation of women from the burqa. This imperial feminist logic assumes a universal category of "woman," erasing all difference, and condones imperial violence by adapting British colonialism's civilizing narrative and replacing it with imperial feminism and gay rights. Does an invocation of "queer theory" denote an imperial project?

Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel question queer theory's relationship to imperialism and observe that " by invoking non-Euro-American sources, settings, and epistemes as exemplars, queer theory mostly speaks to U.S. mappings of queer, rather than transacting across questions from different sites, colluding and colliding along the way."[436] Following Arondekar and Patel, I ask what happens when we think with ethno-racial difference, across divergent temporalities and spatialities, as against what Spivak calls "epistemic violence" that is not only involved in a project of critique characterized as "reparative reading."[437] Can we extend the problem of identity and desire toward what Spivak calls an "uncoercive rearrangement of desires," and what Derrida calls "différance" as difference from or deferral from queer theory, or to

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[436] Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel, "Area Impossible: Notes towards an Introduction," *GLQ* 22, no. 2 (2016), 152.

[437] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 123-152.

decouple queer theory (in a manner akin to what Stuart Hall does with ethnicity) "as it functions in the dominant discourse, from its equivalence with nationalism, imperialism, racism and the state," imagining new queer formations?[438] Gayatri Gopinath provides us with the productive concept of a "queer diaspora," arguing that "queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation."[439] Yet this invocation is premised upon an identification with subjectivity as opposed to an interpretation of what an artwork does, that does not inhere to subjectivity nor identity. My interest here is in a certain difference from Euro-American epistemologies as they relate to identification, applying this formulation to non-diasporic subjectivity.

Hall tracks a shift from a struggle of minoritarian access to representation, "from a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself."[440] I would argue that in our contemporary social media saturated environment, we have entered a phase in which the politics of representation that refuses respectability has moved from oppositional modes to a mode of representation that resists transparency, that may enact a refusal of representation, that is also a refusal of representational

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[438] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Terror: A Speech After 9-11," *boundary 2* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 81-111; Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1978).

[439] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005): 11.

[440] Stuart Hall, "New ethnicities," from *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996): 444. Hall cites the Black Audio Film Collective's "complexly mediated" inter-textual film *Handsworth Songs* and Hanif Kureshi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* for their "refusal to represent the black experience in Britain as monolithic, self-contained, sexually stabilized and always 'right-on'—in a word, always, and only 'positive.'" Ibid., 448-449.

politics as static identities. While there are narratives of homosexuality across South Asia that approximate Euro-American "coming out" narratives as liberatory, I argue that these too are teleological and hegemonic. These narratives move from the idea of an oppressed, interiorized subjectivity to exteriorized, liberatory subject position that breaks free into public space, proudly "out," a transparent subject whose identity is defined through sexual acts. In the context of South Asia, these narratives are also evoked by critiques of the "chadar aur char diwari" (chadar and four doors) motto used by the military government to infer that the proper place for women was in their homes. The women's movement directly challenged this by placing their bodies in public space and violating laws regarding gathering in public space, while feminist poets Kishwar Naheed, Fahmida Riaz, and Habib Jalib also resisted through verse. Saadia Toor notes that Naheed and Riaz both innovated stylistically and formally in their poetry through the direct challenge to the Pakistani state and the measures of Islamization of Zia's government that discriminated against women. Toor notes that Naheed was charged with obscenity and suspended from her government job, while a warrant was issued for Riaz's arrest, which she avoided by going into exile to India. Their work differed in style and affect from that of progressive poets such as Parveen Shakir and Ada'a Jafri, who used the ghazal form, but without the explicitly "political" tone and subject matter of Naheed and Riaz. Toor argues that the poetic form of the ghazal remains political despite its difference from the explicit content of Riaz and

Naheed, and argues that for Shakir and Jafri to "openly and critically engage with the vicissitudes of heterosexual relationships in the context of a sexist society could not but be a political act."[441] I extend this interest in the ghazal and the relationship between the lover and beloved as a site of fugitivity, too—an insurgent love that escapes all social logics.

There are modes of literary production that take up amorous subjects and the forms of the nazm, ghazal, and prose poem in Urdu that bear no relation to "coming out" narratives and might be better understood as "going in"—equivalent to the state of fana, or an annihiliation of the self in union with the beloved, in which one the individual self is eliminated, a different tradition that is also evoked by Glissant's "to refuse to consent to be a single being."[442] While Euro-American queer discourse is articulated against an enclosure, the closet, from which the individual hopes to break free, moving from private to public, it echoes the injunction in Pakistan that women stay in the privacy of their homes—an interesting conflation of the woman with the interior of the home or as a kind of object or furniture, not unlike the closet, located within the privacy of domestic space, as against the recognition of the individual self as a subject. I am interested here in the possibility of a non-sovereign subject who is co-

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[441] Toor, *State of Islam,* 140.

[442] See Fred Moten, *Black and Blur: consent not to be a single being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Manthia Diawara, "One World In Relation: Édouard Glissant in conversation with Manthia Diawara," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 2011, no. 28 (Spring 2011): 4-19; Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

constituted through their union with the beloved, as an embodied experience of fana in Sufism.[443]

The poet Alavi read an untitled Urdu poem at a conference in Lahore that troubles the ontology of the closet and the hegemonic narrative of "coming out" and described a moving inwards, from which I am drawing my impression that the poem was a "going in" narrative. The recitation of the text was a singular event with no record, meant to remain an ephemeral experience, and so the recollection here is solely from my memory. I have spoken to the artist after the fact, and he is insistent on it being archived by the audience, registering a movement that is echoed in Julie Tolentino's performance practice of the "Body as Archive." Even the paper upon which Alavi's poem was written was destroyed after the reading, which the poet considers a "performance," a continuation of the effacement of self that I argue is also constitutive of the poem.[444]

Lala's layta hua khat treats the verticality of the body, or the figure instead as ground, with potential horizontality. The line, which we can also understand as the erect figure, bends, arches and is joined to the ground, in waves, or what is called the dip and drop in vogue vernacular. That same erect figure finds itself subjected to deep

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[443] For more on Sufism and the concept of fana, see William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007). For writing on fana in the Indo-Persian tradition of poetry, see Heideh Ghomi, "The imagery of annihilation (Fana') in the poetry of Sa'ib Tabrizi, in *Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750): The Safavid & Mughal Period*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007): 493-517.

[444] Alavi, an ephemeral text and conversation, "Queer Futures Conference," Lahore, Pakistan, March 2019. Alavi is developing a series of poems around this idea.

dip in Lala Rukh's line work that is always multiple flurries, whether it depicts a body in her figure drawings, which are rendered quickly, or aqueous ground in her "seascapes" series that are a meditation on the time of labor, through both the seriality of the work and its laborious process of production.

First, there is the use of fragile photo paper in the darkroom, then affixing that delicate paper atop another board, then the reworking of the "image" through a layered technique that is fastidious, careful, and slow, to draw out what the photograph has dulled through its unusual application to black paper. It is a drawing out of depths of darkness and shadow at night, and not in the illumination of the day. Unlike the black and white, large format photographic series *Seascapes* (2003) by Hiroshi Sugimoto, whose titles indicate the many bodies of water that Sugimoto frames identically, and in which he smooths out the ripples of the water, Lala enhances them through the rippled texturing of her page and does not differentiate her seascapes through titles. The imaginal and the observational realms blur in her work, as well as media—the photograph morphs back into painting, while its seriality evokes photographic repetition without a clear referent. Sugimoto's photographs are painterly, measuring time in repetition, whereas Lala's paintings return photography to painting, and measure the time of labor as recursive, not teleological. Lala is not concerned with the binaries of modernity and tradition, unlike Sugimoto. Her work more closely resembles the graphite drawing *Untitled (Ocean)* (1970) by the Latvian artist Vija Celmins, who also

explores the ocean's surface and the refraction of light upon water, in which there is no horizon.[445] Celmins, like Lala Rukh, also worked from one medium to another, transforming the black and white photographs of the ocean's choppy surface into drawings.

Working with photography and seascapes, Lala Rukh mixes techniques from pre-modern miniature painting, colonial landscape painting, and post-modern photography. Munesuke Mita writes about the primordial substance in Sugimoto's photographs "water and air," and their uniqueness despite the horizon in each image.[446] If Sugimoto's work slows and stills time, disentangling it from the speed of modern life and producing in the viewer an extended mediation through large-scale photographs, Lala Rukh's returns multiple temporalities to the space of one page, in a small scale that also slows down the viewer but emphasizes the time of the labor of the hand, a preoccupation of many post-independence artists in Lahore. Sugimoto asks himself, "Can somebody today view a scene just as primitive man might have?"[447] to which Lala might have questioned the very concept of the primitive and the modern and its relationship to linear progress, as part of a colonial and neo-imperialist teleology.

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[445] See: *Vija Celmins*: *To Fix the Image in Memory*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, December 15, 2018 –March 31, 2019.

[446] Munesuke Mita, *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Seascapes* (Bologna: Damiani, 2015).

[447] *Hiroshi Sugimoto*, exhibition catalogue (Berlin and Tokyo: Hatje Cantz Verlag and Mori Art Museum, 2005).

FIGURE 45. LALA RUKH, *RIVER IN AN OCEAN: 6* (1993)

FIGURE 46. LALA RUKH, *RIVER IN AN OCEAN: 2* (1993)

Lala Rukh's figure drawings may at first glance seem unrelated to her better known works on paper from the '90s, completed during a brief respite from her women's movement work. In these works, the artist takes the character of her layta hua khat and transmogrifies it into landscape paintings that take the ocean instead of the land as their subject.[448] High modernism in post-war Western architecture also draws on the phallocentricism of the erect figure through towering skyscrapers and cantilevers, both figures articulated against the ground. Lala Rukh instead takes the erect Alif and turns that figure out into the ground. In her *River in an Ocean* series, it is as if the Alif has

[448] In distinction from the Punjab School, and the work of observational landscape painters such as Khalid Iqbal. See Naqvi, "Khaled Iqbal," *Image & Identity*, 180-187.

landed in a death drop and extends back towards the horizon of its aqueous landscapes.[449]

River in an Ocean (fig. 45 and 46) is a series that consists of six small mixed media drawings on black photographic paper. The artist worked the paper in the darkroom, exposed a photograph of the ocean and manipulated the paper until it took on a grey tone akin to the ocean's surface at night. She then adhered the paper to a board, painstakingly creating small gathers in the paper that are only visible on close inspection, lending the paper the characteristic of moving water. Lala then brandished the paper with graphite to give it a metallic sheen—a technique drawn from miniature painting—and then reworked this finely textured surface with china marker and conte crayon.[450] The light of the waves was painted with a fine brush, in silver paint, the same color that was used in miniature painting to represent water, although it would oxidize to a black hue over time. In one such work, *River in an Ocean: 6* (fig. 45), wavy silver lines depict moonlight reflecting off of the darkened expanse of a larger water body's aqueous surface, creating the snaked form of a "river" in an ocean. The silver lines drawn in this series resemble the quality of the line emerging from her figure drawings and also betray a similar interest in the field condition of the page, or here the ocean,

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[449] Death drop is a dance term describing the way in which Black queer ballroom dancers simulate falling down. The form of the body is a curvilinear one, irreducible to two dimensions. It embodies the elasticity of being caught in the doubled motion of falling and rising.

[450] Naqvi, *Image & Identity*,188.

out of which a serpentine figure of the moon's reflection emerges in a foggy night in which even the horizon is indistinguishable from the sky.[451]

In *River in an Ocean: 2*, nearly imperceptible black lines are drawn atop the water in the same short, languorous strokes (fig. 46). A bright scimitar of light touches the darkly rendered edge of the horizon and breaks apart as it snakes towards the edge of the page. The third drawing in this series is of a dark, cloudy sky, as if right before a storm; the ocean is choppy, glinting evenly across it from the light of the moon. Three of the works are oriented horizontally and two vertically, and in all but one there is a horizon that splits the page. While this series is often described as abstract, it is, in fact, highly representational. The *Ocean in a River* series evokes Ibn al Arabi's writing of "an ocean without a shore."[452] These drawings, unlike her figure drawing, are attentive to light and shadow and volume, particularly in the rendering of the clouds, which recall the motif of the cloud, as a materialist inquiry and with its resonances to toxicity and the environment in the preoccupation with the United States' use of the atomic bomb and the photographs of its mushroom cloud, which we find in Zahoor ul Akhlaq's

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[451] The artist purportedly drew from her memory of seeing the Kabul river below her, the moon glinting upon it, during a nighttime flight. Mariah Lookman in conversation with the author, Lahore, March 2018. There are also rivers that empty into larger bodies of water, offering other possible imaginaries based on these works by Lala Rukh. In addition, time that she spent working near the sea in port cities in Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka, during residences and while she traveled, could also have provided time to spend gazing at the reflection of the moon upon the sea, which renders the undulating mass with the texture of light that plays upon it.

[452] Drawn from the title of the book by Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Ocean Without a Shore: Ibn Arabi, The Book, and the Law*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

paintings.[453] If the Impressionists were contending with air pollution and its atmospheric effects, as demonstrated by the thickly rendered sky and the clouds of smoke released by smokestacks in Claude Monet's *Impression*, so*leil levant* (1872), in Lala's work the question of site is more ambiguous. She is not painting from observation, nor does she index industrialization. Instead, her paintings reflect a serialized *process* that is not interested in industrialization, mechanization, or even post-industrial conceptual art's deskilling. In contrast, her work demonstrates an investment in handmade seriality, craft, and abstract photographic practices that she draws together with Urdu poetry, non-linear form, and repetition.

Rukh invented a language of marks that draw from calligraphy, but are more related to the image than text, in her series called *Hieroglyphics.* She moved from *The River in an Ocean* works to *Hieroglyphics* in the mid-'90s, while she was still teaching at NCA. Although calligraphic work is at times difficult to decipher, it still follows particular styles and forms of Arabic scripts, whereas Lala created a new form of language that is affective and elliptically related to script. The title of this work is drawn from the Faiz Ahmed Faiz nazm of the same name, which translates in English to *Some lover to some beloved*. In Lala Rukh's tripartite work of India ink on airmail paper,

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[453] Photographs of the United States' use of the atomic bomb on both Nagasaki and Hiroshima, which killed between 150 to 250 thousand civilians and left a legacy of toxicity and illness in its wake, preoccupied ul Akhlaq and other anti-imperial artists across the global South. ul Akhlaq painted a series of large acrylic canvases with clouds sitting atop gridded backgrounds, based off of photographs of the U.S. bombing of Nagasaki during World war II. Gulam Mohammed Sheikh in Baroda also made a series of works on the nuclear cloud, predating the concern with air and environmentalism in the West.

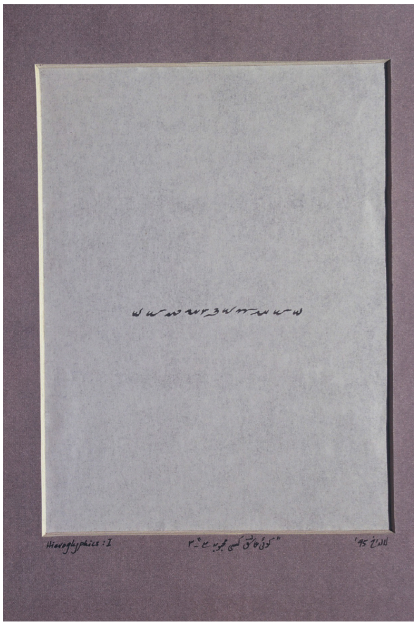

FIGURE 47. LALA RUKH, *HIEROGLYPHICS I: KOI ASHIQ KISI MEHBOOBA SE 1* (1995)

FIGURE 48. LALA RUKH, *HIEROGLYPHICS I: KOI ASHIQ KISI MEHBOOBA SE 2* (1995)

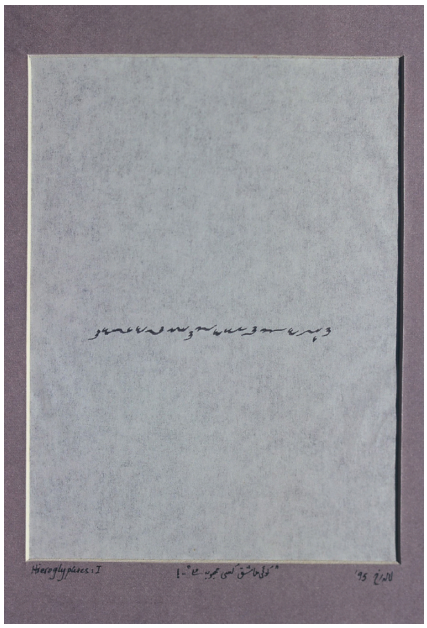

FIGURE 49. LALA RUKH, *HIEROGLYPHICS I: KOI ASHIQ KISI MEHBOOBA SE 3* (1995)

Hieroglyphics: koi ashiq kisi mehbooba se 1, 2 and 3 (figs. 47–49), a series of sinuous forms, resembling the wavy variegated lines from the artist's figure drawings, are situated in a single line in the middle of the page.[454] The first image in this series is comprised of a double barrel, as if the letter Seen (س) was separated from its curved tail, a shape that also resembles the Arabic-Urdu number 3 (۳) if it was severed from its stem. This shape also bears a resemblance to the shadda, a diacritic that is used in Arabic, which was originally adopted to teach non-native speakers how to pronounce the letters in words they may not have been familiar with. Curvilinear shapes move as if they are above or below the writing, resembling diacritics or the shape of a letter akin to a Hamza (ء) that sits slightly below the broken line. This doubly curved shape tessellates across the page,

[454] Naqvi, *Image & Identity,* 187-188.

rotating and moving up and down against the datum of the center line, creating a kind of unstable, porous horizon. The second work in *Hieroglyphics I* continues the same strategy, as does the third, prompting the viewer to wonder if they are gazing at three pages of a letter to a beloved in which what is said is not as important as what is left unsaid. The scale of this work mimics the handheld letter, lending the work a further intimacy, as does the title. A beloved, in Urdu and Persian, as opposed to the English lover, implies a spiritual and sensual connection, and the nazm by Faiz that it draws from is a melancholic one, in which two lovers sit with one another without speaking of the promises they had once made nor the losses they have encountered since.

The second series in this work is *Hieroglyphics II: hara samandar…*, also made of India ink on paper and consisting of four parts. The title translates literally into an ocean whose color is green, but is again a poetic title redolent with multiple meanings; it can connote an ocean full of great sorrow, dreams unfulfilled, and hidden feelings.[455] Unlike the previous *Hieroglyphics I* in which the drawing was centered vertically and horizontally in the center of the page with a border around its edge, in this series the lines stretch to the edges of the page, as if they are the stilled frames of a film separated by the individual frames into their temporal moments. The tactic that the artist uses here, of drawing across multiple pages as opposed to one long sheet of paper, evokes the media of the book through its scale and also the photograph, through its multiple

[455] Sakina Shirazi in conversation with author via WhatsApp, August 1, 2019.

"frames" that capture distinct moments, in the swell of one wave of the ocean over a period of time, stretching across the four frames. *Hieroglyphics I* recalled the epistolary form of a text that is rendered opaque, the hieroglyphic remainder of what was left unsaid between the lover and the beloved, the trace of a letter that the viewer could not read but could feel. Here, in *hara samandar…* the implied horizon in the work, the edge at which the ocean touches the sky, is rendered as the swell of the water's surface as it undulates across the page abstracted from observational drawing, distinct from the ocean that is abstracted from reality and impervious to light and shadow in the *Ocean in a River* series.

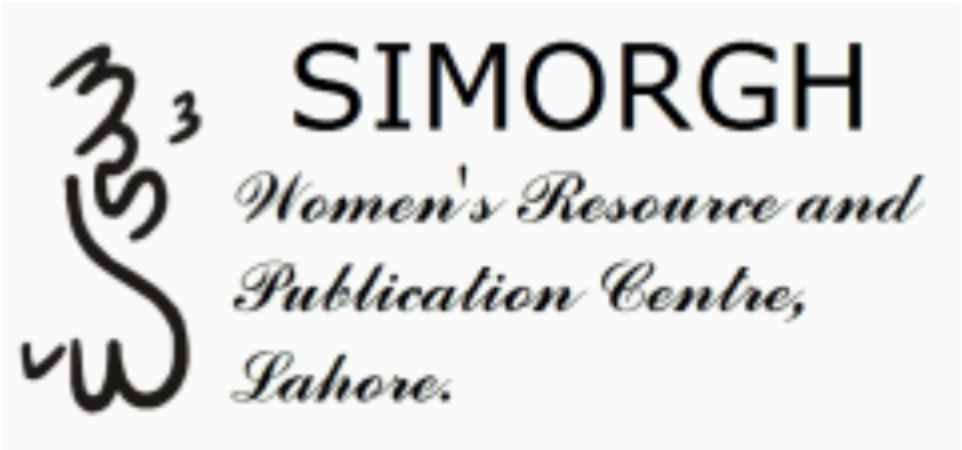

FIGURE 50. LALA RUKH, SIMORGH LOGO (1985)

The forms in this work resemble the logo that Lala Rukh designed for the Simorgh women's resource and publication centre that she co-founded in 1985 (fig. 50). The Simorgh is a mythical bird often used as a metaphor for God drawn from the epic

Persian poem "The Conference of the Birds" written by Farid ud-din Attar in the 12h century. The Simorgh in the story is described by the women's collective website as:

> the Hoopoe, the symbol of inspiration, assembles the birds (or faculties) to begin the Quest for the fabulous Simorgh. Those who are attached to the phenomenal world give excuses of not making the journey. The nightingale, that aspect of self caught in the exterior form of things, cannot leave the water—the hawk cannot leave its prey. Only those faculties which have been awakened to the inner aspect of things, and see beyond materiality, choose to make the journey towards completion. At the end of the Quest, the birds find that the Simorgh has been with them, guiding them from within, throughout the journey. The goal of the Quest is the self.[456]

The logo for the collective consists of four segments and includes the same typology of rounded lines arranged into a shape that evokes an abstracted figure. There is one larger Seen (س) shape with a long tail that anchors the bottom, with a small "U" offset from it to the left. A smaller shape with many more declensions is rotated and nests at an angle into the first shape's tail, while the last piece is a small shadda shape located below. With the design of this logo we can draw a line from Lala Rukh's figure drawings to this logo and then to her drawings *Ocean in a River* and the ink on paper drawings in *Hieroglpyhics*. This means that this line, the layta hua khat, cuts across her entire career and defines a feminist formalism that pervades her drawings and offers itself as an oppositional method of mark-making against the Alif of phallocentric patriarchy.

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[456] Simorgh Women's Resources and Publication Center, "Why Simorgh?" http://simorgh.org.pk/ (accessed July 23, 2021).

Rukh's counter-hegemonic practice challenged what then constituted the mostly male, modernist domain of artistic practice. Furthermore, the symbolism of the woman in the work of male modernists across South Asia—in Pakistan with Shakir Ali, Chughtai, and Abedin, as well as in undivided India, with the Shantiniketan school's use of the rural woman through paintings that drew from Pahari and Mughal miniature—remained patriarchal, though it was anti-colonial. The body of the woman represented as a landscape within which the anti-colonial project galvanizes itself, the woman as the bearer of tradition—all of these patriarchal, anti-colonial, nationalist representations were not countered by Lala Rukh through the style of feminist artistic practices that reclaimed the body of the woman and represented it from the vantage point of the woman artist. In this postcolonial context, under martial law, in which the figure of the woman's body was overdetermined both through patriarchal artistic representations and the charge it carried as a result of the law, Lala Rukh's response was to refuse its figuration as object. Whereas her activism and WAF's formation were direct reactive responses to the violence of the state, Lala Rukh's practice was impelled by a different force. Lala Rukh remained invested and interested in the link between writing and drawing, using calligraphic form, which lies between image and text, and rather than fixating on the body, she focused on the woman's gaze: curvilinear landscapes, the undulation of water bodies, the sinuous contours of sand became the sites of her feminist reclamation.

It was a late '60s artist's talk by a sick Sadequain, who just returned from Europe, to the fine arts students at Punjab University that earned him the highest praise from Lala Rukh in her Master's thesis at the University of Chicago:

> His images were symbolic and real—of figures caught inextricably in webs of their own fabrication or imaginings, of headless men contemplating themselves, and of crows scavenging on brains and bodies…. It seemed to me that he was the only artist whose vision reflected our condition and the larger society's, the only artist who seemed relevant to the times.[457]

Her recollection was from 1968, just before a small student protest against General Ayub Khan erupted into huge demonstrations that mobilized multiple cross-sections of Lahori society. Working class laborers, journalists, and lawyers eventually joined the students, occupying and reclaiming the public promenade of the Mall, chanting slogans and demanding political reform. Lala Rukh described the success of the mobilizations before returning to what she describes as the "clarity and scope" that comes from lived experience with "concrete reality," which some artists, such as Sadequain, have the wherewithal to express. This expression was something she aspired to in her own work, through lived experiences and concrete realities, to connect with the urgency of the time through one's work, to make a thing that might galvanize or be encountered not by a few but by all classes of a society, like the unbridled power and energy of the jalsa or

[457] Lala Rukh Khan. M.F.A. Paper, University of Chicago, June 11, 1976: 8.

street protest.[458] The sound of the jalsa, of many voices engaged in call and response, countered the individuated voices amplified by the state during punishment: "there used to be a microphone by the mouth of those being punished and done in public live."[459] There is a sound recording that Lala Rukh was working on from fragments of audio she had recorded at jalsas, and also of a bird's song in her backyard, that she never completed, in which the collective sound is rendered akin to the sound of a single bird, evoking the figure of the fictional Simorgh, after which a flock of birds are in pursuit. When the thirty birds reach the figure's dwelling place, they find themselves confronted by their reflection in a lake. In Western Europe and the United States, the concept of social practice emerges in the 1990s via the methodologies of artists engaged in institutional critique of, and with, art museums. But Lala Rukh's practice bears testament to the ubiquitous power of everyday social life as praxis in engaged resistance to, and fugitivity from, institutions far outside the frame of the art museum. Her practice operates at the level of life, lived as critique of other institutions, among them: nation-state, law, education, prison, and war—and toward the proliferation and legacy of an art and life lived beyond critique altogether.

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[458] Lala Rukh asks, "What makes the art of Sadequain approachable to all classes of society? Without sacrificing his own intensely personal imagery or the formal and aesthetic elements of his work, his art is able to reach several levels of consciousness: the consciousness of the intellegentsia, of the Bourgeoisie, and of the proletariat." Ibid., 9-10.

[459] "Conversation between Lala Rukh and Mariah Lookman," Sharjah Institute for Theatrical Arts, March Meeting 2015: *In Our Own Backyard*, http://sharjahart.org/march-meeting-2015/programme/in-our-own-backyard (accessed August 10, 2019).

Epilogue. Rummana Hussain: The technology of the veil and the epidermalization of Islam

> Has she fought battles? Have they been forgotten? Has she joined a revolution? Which movement has she joined? Has she fought for her rights? How do you interpret that? Do you think she believes in Jihad? Did you read it in today's newspaper? Is this a love sign? Did she fight the colonisers? Did she die for it? Or does she sit behind the veil? Is she educated?
>
> —Rummana Hussain, *Is it what you think?* (1998)

> It was the most shocking thing that had happened at a national level in our lives. It really shattered our idea of ourselves, as a modern nation and a culture. And as artists who had a stake in that culture, it attacked every cultural mooring that we had…. It shocked her. It was an invasion into her protected, personal space. Suddenly she felt as if her Muslim identity was being thrust upon her.
>
> —Ram Rahman, 2014[460]

All that remains of Rummana Hussain's performance *Is it what you think?* (1998, figs. 51-53) are blurry, black and white photographs and a text the artist wrote and recited. There is no circulating audio or video footage of the performance—the artist seated on a stool reading aloud with images of female resistance fighters projected upon her body.[461] But these photographs are not all that remains. Traces of the performance exist in the writing and remembrance of her performances. Her gallerist and friend Shireen Gandhy confessed that she was deeply embarrassed by watching Hussain

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[460] Ram Rahman as quoted in Jyoti Dhar, "Prescient Provocateur: Rummana Hussain," *ArtAsiaPacific* 90 (Sept/Oct 2014): 94-103.

[461] The performance is reconstructed through the work and recollections of Kapur and Tamhane. See: Tamhane, "Rummana Hussain: Building Necessary Histories'; Geeta Kapur "Rummana's Question: Is it what you think?".

"perform" *Living on the Margins* (1995) at the National Centre for Performing Arts in Bombay, and forced herself to get up to participate in it. Gandhy and others did not understand what Hussain, the painter, was doing with her body. Gandhy is easy to locate in the video footage, with her tall frame and curly hair, wearing a vest, dutifully washing white cloths, beside her friend. It took time for Hussain's performance work to find its audience. In her belatedness, which is to say in her way of finding time, she too is like the rest of the artists in this dissertation.

Hussain's last performance, *Is it what you think?*, performed one year prior to her death, is described as "brazen" by the art critic Jyoti Dhar, who was too young to have seen it. Geeta Kapur, a friend of the artist who witnessed it writes, "Perhaps I hang too much on Rummana Hussain's frail body, but she risks herself in a way that makes me shudder."[462] In the black and white photographs from this work (fig. 51-53), Hussain is topless, wearing sunglasses and a black chador covering her head. It opens on one side to reveal her shoulders and a snaking mastectomy scar. She wears a white salwaar, and a parandha (a decoration for a braid) which falls down her back; the skin or her back gathers in small folds. Although the artist had images projected onto her body during the performance, there are none visible in these photographs. All existing writing about Hussain's performance repeat identical narratives—the Indian, liberal, secular artist, recasting her identity as a "Muslim woman" in the wake of the "hostile gestures from

[462] Dhar, "Prescient Provocateur."

FIGURE 51. RUMMANA HUSSAIN, *IS IT WHAT YOU THINK?* (1998)

FIGURE 52. RUMMANA HUSSAIN, *IS IT WHAT YOU THINK?* (1998)

FIGURE 53. RUMMANA HUSSAIN, *IS IT WHAT YOU THINK?* (1998)

across the Hindu-Muslim divide."[463] They don't say something else that is true—that her family removed their nameplate from their apartment to avoid being identified as Muslim and attacked because of their names, during the calculated and coordinated attacks that targeted Muslims across caste and class throughout the city, in poor and rich neighborhoods. It demonstrated that however secular you might declare yourself to be, and even if you were rich, you were still a target for anti-Muslim violence, betrayed by your name, an article of clothing you wore, or even the perception that you fit some stereotype of what a Muslim looked like.

Hussain's performance *In Between* (1998, fig. 54), which was part of the installation *In Order to Join* (1998) at Art in General, was documented on video. It's difficult to determine whether the artist was performing for the camera or whether the camera was simply documenting the performance. Hussain was in New York City for cancer treatment, and also holding a residency at Art in General, for which she made a multi-work installation, which included an edited video of the artist walking across the Queensboro Bridge to Manhattan, barefoot, with ghunghroo's on her ankles, the pirandha in her hair. The soft clothing, her moon-shaped face, and her gentle footsteps are odd juxtapositions against the heavy steel beams of Queensboro, a pedestrian nightmare of chaotically arranged orange and white striped traffic cones with bars. The video includes footage of the artist receiving chemotherapy treatment at the hospital,

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[463] Geeta Kapur, "Rummana's Question: Is it what you think?," SAHMAT, New Delhi, November 2009, https://cdn.aaa.org.hk/_source/digital_collection/fedora_extracted/20832.pdf.

FIGURE 54. RUMMANA HUSSAIN, *IN BETWEEN* (1998). VIDEO STILL

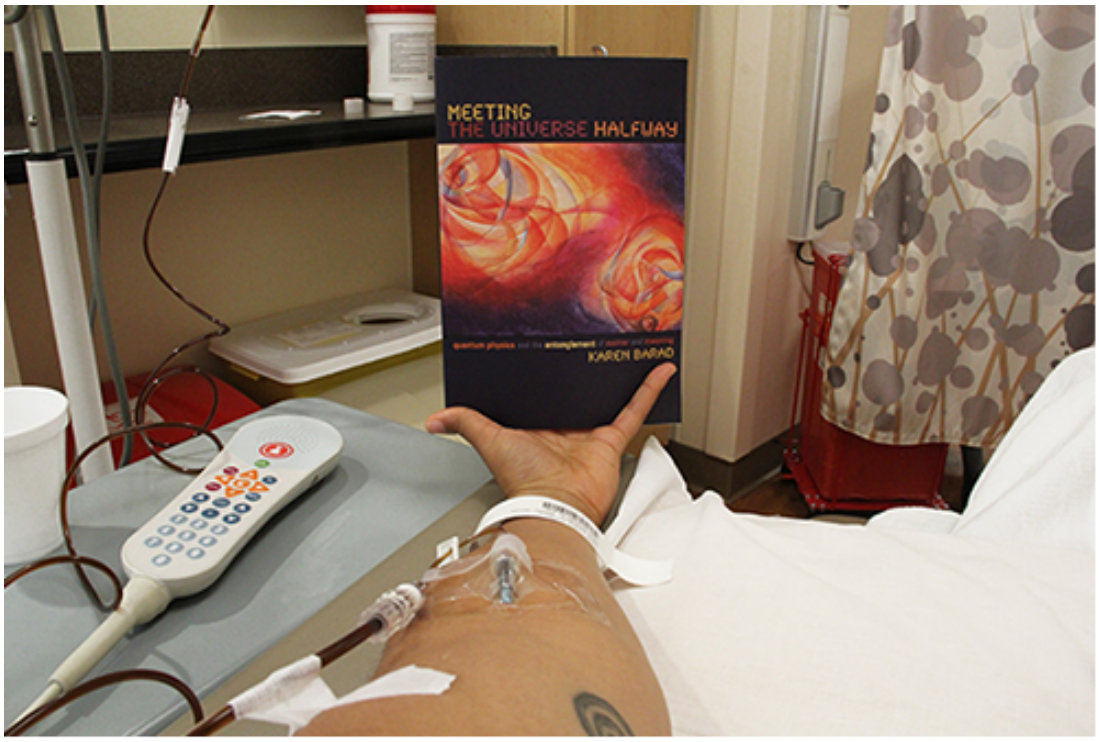

FIGURE 55. CAROLYN LAZARD, *MEETING THE UNIVERSE HALFWAY* (2017), DETAIL, FROM THE SERIES *IN SICKNESS AND STUDY* (2015–ONGOING)

shot by the same cinematographer who accompanied her across the bridge. Hussain sits receiving the chemo intravenously, prescient of the work of young contemporary artists such as Carolyn Lazard, who also counter the isolation of the sick body through documentation that she shares on social media. Lazard's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2017, fig. 55) reminds me of that moment of Hussain's footage from 1998, except Lazard turns the camera away from her face, towards the front cover of a book she's reading, while receiving her intravenous infusion, which she holds in one hand, photographing with the other.

Hortense Spillers, in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," offers us the analytic of "a praxis of ungendered flesh" of the Black body that emerges out of transatlantic slavery.[464] Spillers differentiates the "body" of liberated subject positions from the "flesh," writing, "before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflects of iconography."[465] I draw from Spillers and Sylvia Wynter for their critiques of the overrepresentation of secular, enlightenment humanism, or what Sakai describes as humanitas, and the pressure they put on the category of the human. The disembowling of a pregnant woman, which occurred in Bombay in the 1992 pogroms targets reproduction of Muslims through the flesh of the mother and the child, a biological,

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[464] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 61.

[465] Ibid.

ethno-racialized logic.[466] The single mastectomy scar across Hussain's chest, which Kapur describes as a "maimed breast," evokes the image of amputated women's breasts that filled gunny-bags during partition, as much as the maimed breasts of those women.[467] Swapnaa Tamhane observes the resemblance of Hussain's breast prosthesis to the dome of a Masjid.[468] By asking "Is it what you think?" Hussain seems to ask, is a Muslim a person or a thing?

Frantz Fanon begins *Black Skin, White Masks* by asking the question, "Why write this book?" followed by, "What does a man want? What does the black man want?" He writes, in response: "At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man."[469] The hyper-visibility of blackness resides for Fanon in its corporeality; the imperative statement that he recounts— "Look, a Negro!" —is reproduced in its repetition, instantiating what he describes as evidence of his "non-being[470] or what Aimé Césaire describes as colonialism's "thingification."[471] In

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[466] During the Gujarat massacres in 2002, which were condoned and initiated by Narendra Modi who was then Chief Minister, the abdomens of three pregnant women were cut open and the fetus removed and thrown into a fire. There was one such incident caught on camera of one man admitting to having done so to Ms. Kausar Banu, who was raped, cut open, and burnt outside her home. Ujjwalanayudu, "Even demons have shame: Kausar's husband," *The Indian Express*, August 29, 2012, http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/even-demons-have-shame-kausar-s-husband/994966/.

[467] See: Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice Candy Man/Cracking India* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1991); Antonia Navarro-Tejero, "Sacks of Mutilated Breasts: Violence and Body Politics in South Asian Partition Literature," *Journal of International Women's Studies,* 20 (3): 44-50.

[468] Swapnaa Tamhane, "Rummana Hussain: Building Necessary Histories," *n.paradoxa international feminist art journal,* Vol. 34 (July 2014): 54.

[469] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 1.

[470] Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," in *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 35-67.

[471] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 84; Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism.*

"Algeria Unveiled," Fanon argues that the veil is both a tool of struggle and a symbol of resistance, made visible by the French colonizer's attempt to unveil the Algerian woman during the war of liberation. The veil is a technology, a flexible skin that marks the body of the person who moves in it as part of the controlled, colonized population residing in the casbah. When singer Rachid Taha takes the Clash's "Rock the Casbah" and restitutes it to Algerians through "Rock el Casbah," he creates a line of flight, a futurity for anyone who feel its contagion and infectious joy. Anne Anlin Cheng describes Josephine Baker's nakedness as a form of veiling, in that her skin is:

> discursively associated with, at times even rhetorically replaced by, other corporeal habits: banana skin, feathers, drapery. In her films, during the very moment of literal and symbolic exposure, she is also often curiously and immediately covered over by everything from dirt to coal to flour…. In short, with Baker, *being unveiled often also means being covered over.*[472]

Here the veil is discursively associated with and, and also replaced by, other corporeal habits.

Architectural historians have recounted the ways in which French colonial urban development resulted in a "traditional" kasbah that was purposely left underdeveloped while the colonial center was "modernized."[473] This binary of tradition and modernity,

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[472] Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8.

[473] See: Samia Henni, *Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria* (Zurich: GTA Verlag, 2017); Gwendolyn Wright, "Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy, 1900-1930," *The Journal of Modern History,* Volume 59, No. 2, (June 1987): 291-316.

created by design, is embodied by the stasis of the kasbah's infrastructure, its roads, sewage, and electrical grid, which were produced through colonial development strategies that used the tools of urban planning and architectural design to keep it frozen in time. A man or woman wearing the veil can only then exist discretely tucked inside the kasbah; the body in the veil is conflated with "traditional" architecture—and furthermore with femininity that is attached to domestic space, or the women's space of the zenana, from which the veiled woman emerges, which she is then perceived as carrying with her, and making her "misplaced" as an object or thing if she entered the colonial center. For Fanon, the French colonizer's attempt to unveil the Algerian woman is to diffuse a threat, to detonate a weaponized body, to render it transparent and penetrable, visually and erotically. To unveil, though, is not just to *see*; it is to enter the veil as one enters a building. It conflates the woman with the veil and the veiled woman with the kasbah, offered up as something both impenetrable and, with violence, penetrable. The veiled woman is objectified, yes, but the demand to see the woman without the veil, rendering it nothing more than a fabric at the moment at which its opacity, its very function, is a threat to the state, requires more language to understand what this function of unveiling in fact does. Is the veiled woman oppressed? Is she a revolutionary? Does she fight for her rights? Does a woman who remains at home not fight for her rights? What is the domain of rights? Is the domain of rights always public?

What are the rights of women in the space of the home? Is a woman only a home? A site of residence? A body to be inhabited by others? Can a woman inhabit herself?

In the context of the Algerian Revolution, urban development and architecture defined what constituted tradition and modernity, from language to education to the fabric of the city and the conflation of neighborhood with identity, while the post-independence, postcolonial context of India maintains these juxtapositions of modern and traditional, hegemonic citizen-subject and its outside, through new forms and subjectivities that are not unrelated to the old. The conflation of the veiled woman with her home also exists in the Hindi-Urdu phrase "chaador aur chaar diwari." This phrase was popularized during the military rule of General Zia in the 1980s in Pakistan when it became an injunction that woman remain in the home, in a sense that they return to purdah, a form of gender segregation that was observed by both Hindu and Muslim upper-caste families pre-partition—a form of social organization that is pre-modern, in which women's education and life occurred primarily in the space of the home, while men occupied public spaces.

General Zia's invocation of "chaador aur chaar diwari" in the context of Cold War U.S.-Pakistan relations in the 1980s—after both the Iranian Revolution in 1979 overthrew the U.S.-backed Shah and the victory of the U.S.-supported Mujaheddin in resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan—is a complicated one. The response of artists and writers who were part of the women's movement was to refuse the

injunction to remain in their homes. Fahmida Riaz's poem *Chaadar aur Chardivaari* became a nara, slogan, during protests. In one women's movement protest against the Law of Evidence, Lala Rukh burned her dupatta, or scarf, in a fire (fig. 56), which was caught by a photographer and resulted in her being brought in to the principal's office at National College of the Arts where she was then a professor, and where it was forbidden for faculty to engage in political agitation against the government.

Zarina, based at the time in New York, took this phrase, and instead of refuting and refusing it outright, as women did in both India and Pakistan, made a portfolio and titles it in its English translation that excises its reference to the chaador but draws from this same Hindi-Urdu phrase: *A House with Four Walls.* Zarina who was not raised in purdah but whose mother lived in purdah, within the four walls of the home, revealed the classed and caste dimensions of the phrase, the privilege one has of being house, of even having a home to remain in. What varies in these gestures is the thingification of a woman through the veil, which is resisted, and in Zarina's case, addressed obliquely—the home that is conflated with woman, the shroud atop her body that is also indicative of belonging and having a home within which to remain, which necessarily excludes the refugee and the migrant. The Hindi-Urdu phrase also conflates the fabric of the chaador with the enclosure of the home, to multiple effects. In one, the woman is erased, she is made a thing not a human; in another, she gains a home, through her conflation with architecture, through the demand for housing, which I argue in

FIGURE 56. LALA RUKH AND OTHER WOMEN'S MOVEMENT ACTIVISTS BURNING THEIR DUPATTA'S AT A PROTEST ORGANIZED BY THE WOMEN'S ACTION FORUM, LAHORE (1987). PHOTOGRAPHY BY AZHAR JAFFERY

previous chapters is a demand that foregrounds domestic space as a space of habitation over the space of the nation that inhabits us—home as technology and the veil as architecture, or home as a space of inhabitation and the nation as a performance of habitation. To be a thing is not only to be dehumanized. To be a thing is also to camouflage oneself.

Hussain revealed her chest, what Kapur and Dhar describe as her post-mastectomy breast, although, with the breast and nipple removed this description seems to invoke an ableist nostalgia for a healthy body. Hussain does not reveal her left

breast but does reveal the soft, breast prosthesis of her right, in *Living in the Margins.* Hussain is using the veil in this performance as a technology, as she occupies an in-between space in the photographs, what looks like a terrace that is not interior nor exterior, but is both inside/outside. The veil mimics these spatial characteristics. It is neither on or off, and her body is also in an in-between state of enclosure and disclosure. Did the veil slip and lose its hold on its right side, while it remained held in place on the left due to the protuberance of her breast? Perhaps a chest with its masculine connotations need not be covered like a breast and it is this logic that results in the reveal on this one side of her mastectomy. During the performance that Kapur witnessed, she remembers that the artist had images of women who participated in the Iranian Revolution projected atop her body, veiled revolutionaries holding guns. In Shirin Neshat's *Women of Allah* series (1994) the veiled woman armed with a gun, the subject of so many ethnographic and journalistic gazes, looks back at the viewer. Iftikhar Dadi notes that Neshat does not unveil her figures nor does she inscribe Quranic verses atop them, but utilizes Persian feminist poetry instead.[474] The calligraphy atop the faces of the women complicates the reading of the images for people who can read it, while for those whom the script is illegible, it becomes a site of the projection of anxieties and desires.

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[474] See Iftikhar Dadi, "Shirin Neshat's Photographs as Postcolonial Allegories," *Signs* 34, no. 1 (Autumn 2008), 140.

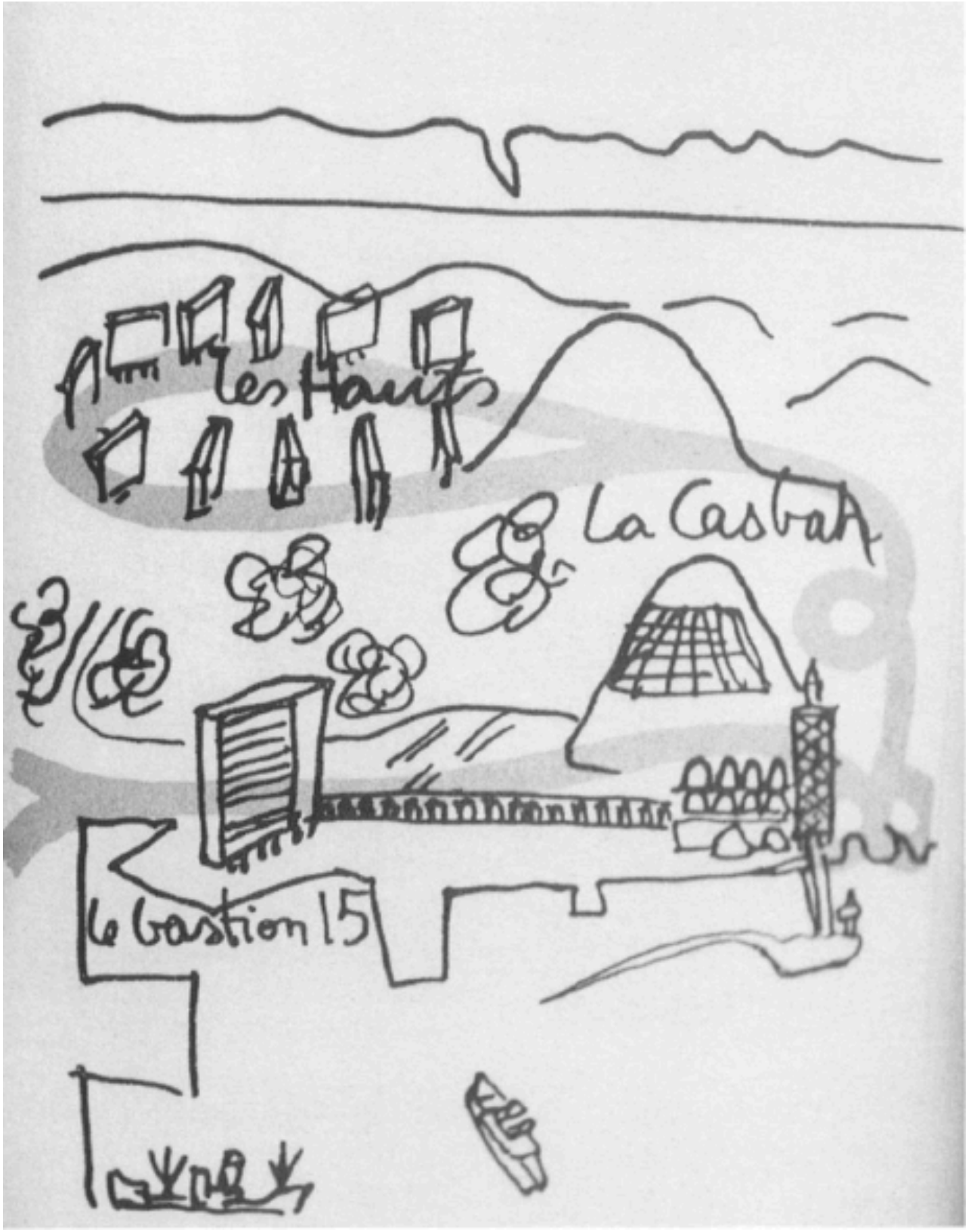

FIGURE 57. LE CORBUSIER, SKETCH OF THE CASBAH, ALGIERS (1930S), FROM LE CORBUSIER, *POESIE SUR ALGER* (1950; FACSIMILE REPRINT, PARIS: FONDATION LE CORBUSIER, 1989)

In Le Corbusier's drawings of Algiers (fig. 57), the French architect represents "la casbah" as a veiled woman, a caricature of sorts, near the Mediterranean Sea with a single boat coming into the port to dock. The sketch is a loose perspectival view from above. A series of tall, thin, modernist housing on pilotis, "les halles," are arranged in a circle in the distance, separated from the anthropomorphic, volcanic casbah, rendered with a mesh net where her face might be. The casbah is next door to a mosque, depicted with its tall phallic minaret and series of squat rotund domes, connected by a straight path to modernist governmental building down the road. The casbah, domes, and minaret echo the organic shapes of hills in the landscape, feminized forms that are opaque while the road and modernist buildings are rectilinear and transparent, with floor to ceiling windows. Zeynep Celik notes that this representation of the casbah feminized the colonized territory, a common Orientalist theme in European descriptions and representations of Islam.[475] Celik notes that Le Corbusier frequented brothels in Algiers and sketched nude women, his drawings revealing double images: "the veiled (the hidden, the mysterious) and the nude (the prostitute, the conquered)."[476] The theme of penetration repeats itself under colonial rule—policies that penetrated the privacy of Muslim family life, women encouraged to discard their veils: "The rationale was that if

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[475] Zeynep Celik, "Le Corbusier, Orientalism, Colonialism," *Assemblage* 17 (April 1992): 58-77.

[476] Ibid. 74.

women were conquered, the core structure of this unyielding society would be destroyed, leading to its total surrender."[477]

Hussain was also interested in architecture, the hole in the underside of a vacuum, the wet inside of a mouth, the round hollow of a terra cotta pot, the interior of a dome in works ranging from *Living on the Margins* (1995) to *Fragments/Multiples* (1994) and *Home/Nation* (1996). In the text she wrote for her performance *Is it what you think?* she asked:

> Has she a lover/ Do his fingers touch her body? Does she force them up? Is she ecstatic?… Do you think she has radical views? Do you think she can articulate them? Do you think her voice has been stifled? Is that fact or fiction? Have you defined her? Is she the other? Do you pity her? Is that your construct? Is it a predicament?

In the wake of the Algerian revolution and the Iranian revolution, the figure of the veiled woman carries with it a resistant image, but one that is read through colonial frameworks as atavistic, pre-modern, a religious as opposed to secular subject. This discourse of secularism is also used in writing about Rummana Hussain, who Kapur writes, "had already begun to explore the implications of being a Muslim woman," a descriptor of racialization appended to woman.[478] Drawing from the orientalist colonial gaze of the veiled woman, is there a way in which this hypervisibility of veiled women

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[477] Ibid. 71.

[478] Kapur, "Rummanna's Question."

constitutes what Frantz Fanon calls "epidermalization"? What Cheng calls a "second skin"?

> Rummana's identity as an Indian/Muslim bristled when she over-identified with her role; and she worked out a performative economy such as to indicate that she was *giving up* rather than *gaining* an identity, and that she was giving up only to regain her secular rights through political struggle. Rummana put her name to everything secular.[479]

Kapur reads Hussain as giving up her secular identity in a dialectical performativity to demonstrate the thin line that separated her from a larger Muslim community. Zarina read extensively about the Gujarat massacres in 2002, and the story of women whose pregnant stomachs were cut open shocked her. She repeated over and over, "the only thing that separates me from the Muslims in Gujarat is class."[480]

Rummana Hussain was living in Bombay with her family when the 1992 massacres occurred. Unlike other incidents of anti-Muslim violence that were often in working class neighborhoods, in which people were living in close proximity to one another, the Bombay pogroms were unique in that Muslims across the entire city, of all economic classes, were targeted. It is for this reason that the then Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, is suspected of having assisted in its organization, by leaking polling data which activists combed through in order to locate Muslims through their *names*.[481]

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[479] Ibid.

[480] Zarina in conversation with the author, 2016.

[481] Human Rights Watch Reports, "Communalism as Political Strategy," https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/india0703/Gujarat-10.htm

The Hussain family removed their nameplate from home and took shelter in a hotel in South Bombay, near their apartment, until the violence abated. After this, Hussain left figurative painting and began her performance practice.

Although Hussain's work, her investment in pigments and color, her use of her own body in performance work, does not at first glance *look like* the black and white work, much of it on paper, of Zarina, Nasreen Mohamedi, and Lala Rukh, it extends their formal engagements into the realm of performance, and the objecthood of the body of the woman, as property, within the nation-state. Her work is also engaged with architecture, domesticity, and everyday life, particularly with minoritarian life beyond the hegemonic framework of the nation-state. Although she used color in her work, she, like Zarina, used natural pigments, indigo, earth, and charcoal, which all hold a symbolic charge. Her performance *Breaking Skin* echoes Zarina's *Paper like Skin*, this interest in the skin of the body, with hapticality, and the way in which paper, like skin, ages, tears, breaks down, a comment on the fragility of the body and a return to its fragility, impermanence, and its materiality.

This concern with the body and time unites all four artists. Hussain's performances often include bricks, bowls, water, a prosthesis, and she only speaks in a few performances. In the rest she remains silent, subjecting herself to being looked at, as she moves, slowly and deliberately, rendering acts such as walking, kneeling, and standing still a strange charge. The vacuum with its suction hole, echoes a papaya, a

FIGURE 58. RUMMANA HUSSAIN, *LIVING ON THE MARGINS* (1995). VIDEO STILL.

reference to the vagina, her open mouth, a diya, and the motif of a broken pot, its rotund shape shattered. She draws these together with the concave dome of a masjid in her early photographic collages, juxtaposed with a photograph of an open mouth. Then there is Hussain's own mouth held open as if in a scream, with no sound escaping it in an image from her first performance at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (fig. 58). In this image it is her body that is a vessel, that is echoed in various other forms and everyday objects she uses. The artist's formal engagement has often been overlooked in writing due to the narrative of the Bombay pogroms as the moment during which, as Rahman says, "she felt as if her Muslim identity was being thrust upon her." This

narrative overdetermines her identity and oversimplifies the work, on which there is very little analytic engagement. I argue here that Hussain's interest in the body draws it alongside objects, the halved papaya, the dome of a masjid, the curve of terracota pottery, these things that curve, hold, and support, that are associated with feminized reproductive labor and domesticity. I read Hussain's baring of her mastectomy scar and her chest not as the grotesque baring of a maimed breast but as a refusal of the containment of the "sick body."

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