



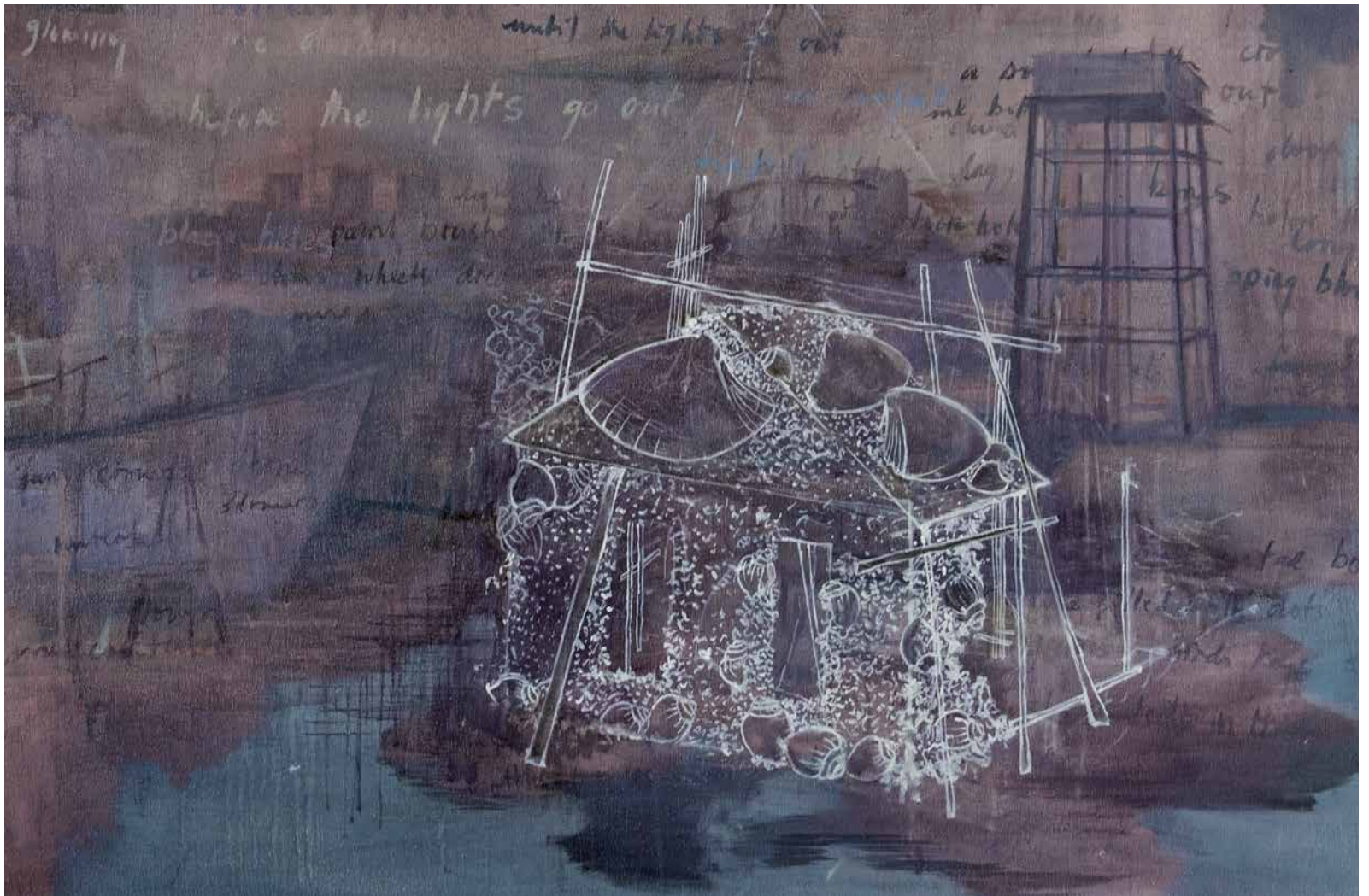
the  
weight of  
things



the  
weight of  
things

new works by naiza khan 2014

curated by maha malik



*Small Creatures Glowing in the Dark* (detail)  
2014  
Oil on canvas  
122 x 183 cm

The Netherlands is renowned for its visual arts tradition. Works by the 17th century Dutch Masters are admired the world over. But the Netherlands is also well known for its leading contribution to fields such as the performing arts, design, and architecture. Dutch society is deeply supportive of the arts.

In this regard, the Prince Claus Fund was established in 1996 as part of Prince Claus's dedication to culture and development. The Fund believes that culture is a basic need and is a driver of development. It supports artists, musicians, critical thinkers, and cultural organisations in spaces where freedom of expression is restricted by factors as wide-ranging as conflict, poverty, repression, marginalisation, or social taboos. Acknowledged amongst prominent institutions of the Netherlands, the Fund has built a diverse global network of practitioners, many of them role models in their own societies.

I am very proud that the Netherlands and the Prince Claus Fund have recognised the work and achievements of Naiza Khan as one of the laureates of 2013. Khan has played a pioneering and multifaceted role in the development of contemporary art in Pakistan. Through her work she has consistently addressed complex concerns. She is an inspiration to young artists, and is a figure of influence both through her art practice and as an educationist. Khan is also one of the founders of Vasl Artists' Collective, which supports artists through residencies, dialogue, and collaboration within an international network.

The Prince Claus Award is first and foremost a testimony to the leadership of Khan in the visual arts. It is also something more. It allows international viewers, including the Dutch audience, to gain a wider perspective on Pakistan. Naiza Khan's practice over the last two decades, and the current exhibition, "The Weight of Things," demonstrate her vital contribution to the field of contemporary art in Pakistan.

Marcel de Vink  
Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

# Embodied Landscapes

by Maha Malik



## I. Beyond the surface of the form

I think I was walking a tightrope. I was trying hard to look for other forms in the figure, forms that go beyond the surface and lead to a new understanding of line in space. But there was also this: another understanding of how the body is felt, and not seen... I was trying to balance a perceptual practice with a conceptual approach to the body and its subjectivity.<sup>1</sup>

(Naiza Khan. 1995 | 2013)

Over the course of 25 years, Naiza Khan has applied a range of media to critical questions of selfhood and spatiality. The early drawing, *Her Body in Four Parts* (1995), depicts a segmented and gestural study of the female form. Rendered in charcoal, its lines resonate with an intimacy and an affective intensity that belie the work's explicit surface.<sup>2</sup> The lower left-hand panel bears an ambivalent notation across darkened form: "the weight of something."

Almost two decades later, in a radically different vocabulary, Khan explores corporeal space through the frame of a large-scale mapping. Rendered in multiple layers of oil paint, *Kurrachee, Past, Present and Future* (2012–13) alludes to cartographic process. The image references the outlay of land and sea—but with a view to both tangible and intangible coordinates. Drawn across the city's geographical surface is a thin film, or membrane, composed of broken, scattering pieces of furniture. *Kurrachee...*, the map, appears at once weighed down and, at the same time, internally eruptive.

On the nature of visibility, phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty makes a significant observation. "It must be that the visible world appears in union with an invisibility...that is the outline and depth of the visible."<sup>3</sup> This idea of intertwining, or "chiasm" between visible and that which is in-the-visible, provides perspective on Khan's mark-making as it has evolved across her oeuvre. It also informs the emotive force of her work.

## II. The weight of things

The current exhibition draws upon an arc of ideas in Khan's work. It indexes the artist's sustained commitment to materiality and, in particular, to expressive capacity within anachronistic form—objects on the verge of erasure.<sup>4</sup> Across a wider horizon,

the show offers a meditation on concerns of spatial terrain and temporal duration. And it considers reciprocal questions of visibility and vision. These multiple lines of thought come together in Khan's work, in the idea of an embodied consciousness of place.

A second set of sightlines follow the artist's heterogeneous craft practice. Works on display include oil paintings, watercolours, drawings, screen prints, photographic and video works, as well as brass sculpture. The exhibition underscores a rich interrelatedness between Khan's creative media and her intellectual project.

III. The evidence of a rooted space, or site, has always been the impetus and in/visible in the conception of my works.<sup>5</sup> (Naiza Khan)

"Landscape needs to be seen as existential space, a space that can be grasped only through the imagination...one which produces its own kind of language [and] creative energy...its own grammar of feeling and of sensation."<sup>6</sup> (J. Michael Dash)

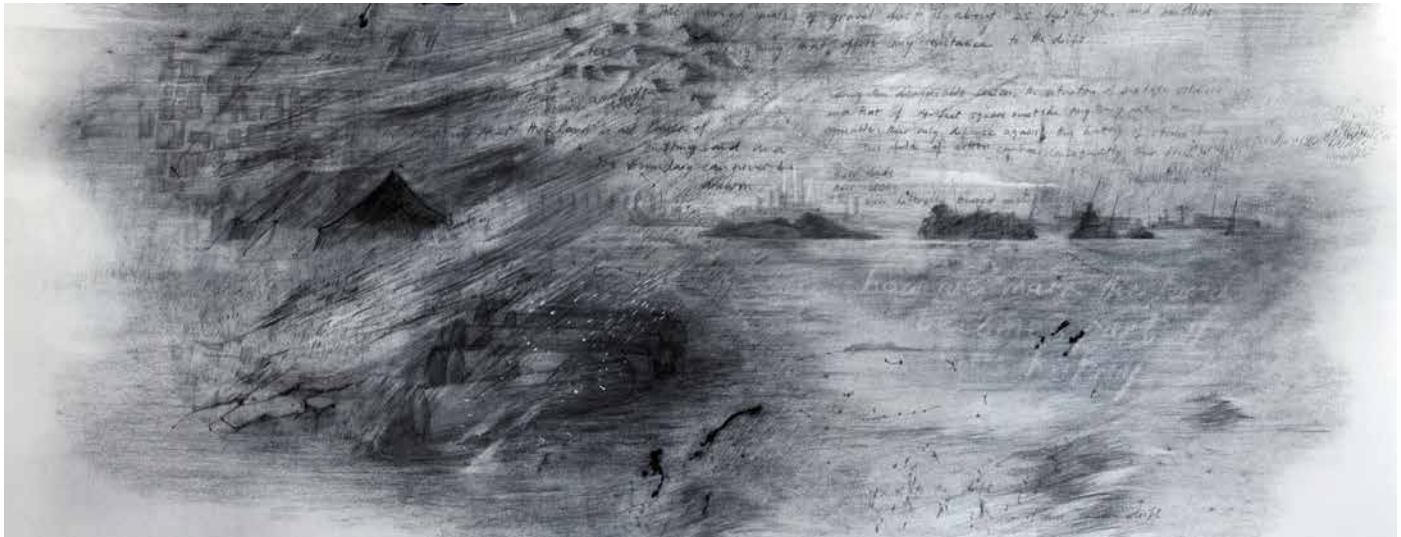
The genre of landscape provides one of several spatial contexts to Khan's current work. In this regard, the exhibition may be viewed as an anthology of landscapes—as contemporary interrogation as well as transgression of the locational genre. Specifically, Khan's work draws upon her engagement with Karachi and its surrounding coastal terrain. Her imaginative geography spans a weave of visual motifs including the sea itself; the city's urban landscape and its architectonic detail; a tenuous horizon line; mutually bound memory-objects; as well as historic document and journal text.

A large charcoal drawing, entitled *How We Mark the Land Becomes Part of its History* (2014), illustrates some of Khan's key concerns. At first view, a distant cityscape appears within the skein of a drifting sandstorm. The surface of the work is further marked by text, personal annotations, as well as excerpts from a British soldier's account of Karachi's weather during the 19th century. The illustration of a labourer's tent and cement pipes—ubiquitous to the metropolis and to the idea of urban development—weigh down the lower left side of the image. This work plays upon the mutual inherence of mapping and landscape art as conceived in early colonial cartography. Its contemporary allusion is, however, to the city's being, marked as it is by historic rupture, a place at once adrift and self-revealing.



Theorist Édouard Glissant's essays on landscape suggest an important reading of Khan's work on place. Much of his thought revolves around the creative rendering and interpretation of landscapes as living markers of history. This approach is especially significant, he suggests, for regions in the non-Western world that are bereft of long-standing archival cultures. With certain forms of dispossession—historic, cultural, psychic, and material—landscape emerges as a powerful constitutive force. "Majestic harmony does not prevail here," he indicates of the genre, "nor pastoral zones of timeless seclusion... Art in these conditions cannot be an object of reassurance."<sup>7</sup>

Glissant further indicates the authorising power of landscape in terms of its lived rhythms. Works by Khan, such as the literally titled screen print *Scattering* (2014), demonstrate this notion of space formulated by its rhythmic valence. The motion blur of a drawing such as *Merry-go-round* (2012), and the translucent, multi-layered washes of Khan's watercolours speak to a similar mode of intelligibility and emotive apprehension—that which is rhythmically based in-the-visible.



*How We Mark the Land Becomes Part of its History*, 2014, Charcoal on Waterford paper, 118 x 153.5 cm



*Merry-go-round* (detail)  
2012  
Charcoal, conte and acrylic on Fabriano  
paper  
118 x 153.5 cm

Related to this, the motif of imaginative construction appears central to Naiza Khan's practice. Building the ground of an image, and the experience of groundlessness, feature across her work. A video piece, entitled *The Observatory* (2012), depicts the ruinous structure of a 19th century weather observatory at Manora Island. As the camera pans through the cavernous building, its slow sweeping movement seamlessly builds a kind of inner volume, where otherwise there is only structural collapse and debris to see. The gesture of visual construction critically alludes to the building up of narrative as well. And this brings to the fore Khan's sustained concern with subjectivity.

#### IV. Landscape as an internal, body-based concept

Conceptions of lived time and space are foundational to critical projects of self-formation. This is where the shaping power of place accrues vital force. In an interview with fellow artist and historian, Iftikhar Dadi, Khan speaks in a similar vein of how walking through Manora Island allowed her a wider experiential imprint in her work. Notions of the walking artist and bodily witness have been discussed within a number of contexts. But in Khan's work the idea of mobility facilitates, in particular, an exploration of temporal duration. She speaks of a kind of "double time"—historic time as well as the lived present in which the artist finds herself immersed.<sup>8</sup> This phenomenon fuels a key aspect of narrative capacity. For it is at the juncture of lived duration that internal and external space become dynamic, sensually

co-extensive, and expressive. Set forth in temporal terms, it is between bodily space and its external horizon that “an exact world...can come to light.”<sup>9</sup>

With reference to concerns of genre, Merleau-Ponty suggests the following: “One cannot conceive of landscape in the structure of which the perceiving self is not implicit.”<sup>10</sup> Subjectivity in Khan’s images may thus be seen as rendered through the same gesture with which landscape is constituted. However, in place of the private individual, as considered by Merleau-Ponty, her work proposes an embodied, historicised, and landed concept of selfhood, within the tempered framework of landscape. This is perhaps the artworks’ most significant attribute, and that which is capable of quarrying meaning deep within its viewers. Even in its most conceptual mark-making, Khan’s work remains powerfully personal.

Maha Malik  
January 2014

Maha Malik teaches at Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi. Her interests include crossovers between art history, visual culture, and literary aesthetics.



*Her Body in Four Parts* (detail)  
1995  
Charcoal on canvas  
61 x 61 cm (each of four panels)

---

<sup>1</sup> 1995 journal entry, revisited in 2013.

<sup>2</sup> This work is part of a diptych—the first, a set of four block images in charcoal; and the second, a conceptual work made with crinkled silk organza and metal wire stitched in parts, replicating the solid use of charcoal on the canvas.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty. “Eye and Mind” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetic Reader: Philosophy and Painting*. Northwestern University Press. Illinois: 1993. p. 37. In relation to Khan’s work, an extended account of Merleau-Ponty’s term “Flesh” may be found in his posthumously published text, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 1964.

<sup>4</sup> This draws upon the notion that traces of meaning reside in material objects, which only release their significance when encountered imaginatively or sensuously.

<sup>5</sup> “Manora to Karachi: A Conversation.” Interview by Iftikhar Dadi with Naiza Khan. Published in *Naiza Khan. Works: 1987–2013*. ArtAsiaPacific: 2013. p. 137

<sup>6</sup> J. Michael Dash. “Homme du toute monde.” *Caribbean Review of Books*, Jan 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Édouard Glissant. *Caribbean Discourse*. University Press of Virginia. Charlottesville: 1999. p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> Dadi-Khan interview, full reference (pp. 136–7): “I think this deeper engagement [as a Karachi-based artist] began with a sense of wandering...in a larger geographical space beyond my own ghettoised kind of residential enclave... [Here was] a possibility of anchoring myself in another temporality. I think in the work, this is where landscape becomes an internal body-based concept, where it loses its direct association to the site and becomes part of something else...something more emotive and conceptual, as a metaphor or a bodily experience... [Through it] I am trying to articulate the sense of double time existing in this place, of deep time and the present, both in which I am submerged.”

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans Colin Smith. Routledge Classics. New York: 2004. p. 115

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, cited in *The Poetic Self, Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism*, by Meena Alexander. Humanities Press Inc. New Jersey: 1980. p. 106

(opposite page)  
*Kurrachee, Past, Present and Future* (detail)  
2012–13  
Oil on canvas  
200 x 256 cm





*Fossilised Land*  
2014  
Watercolour  
46 x 61 cm





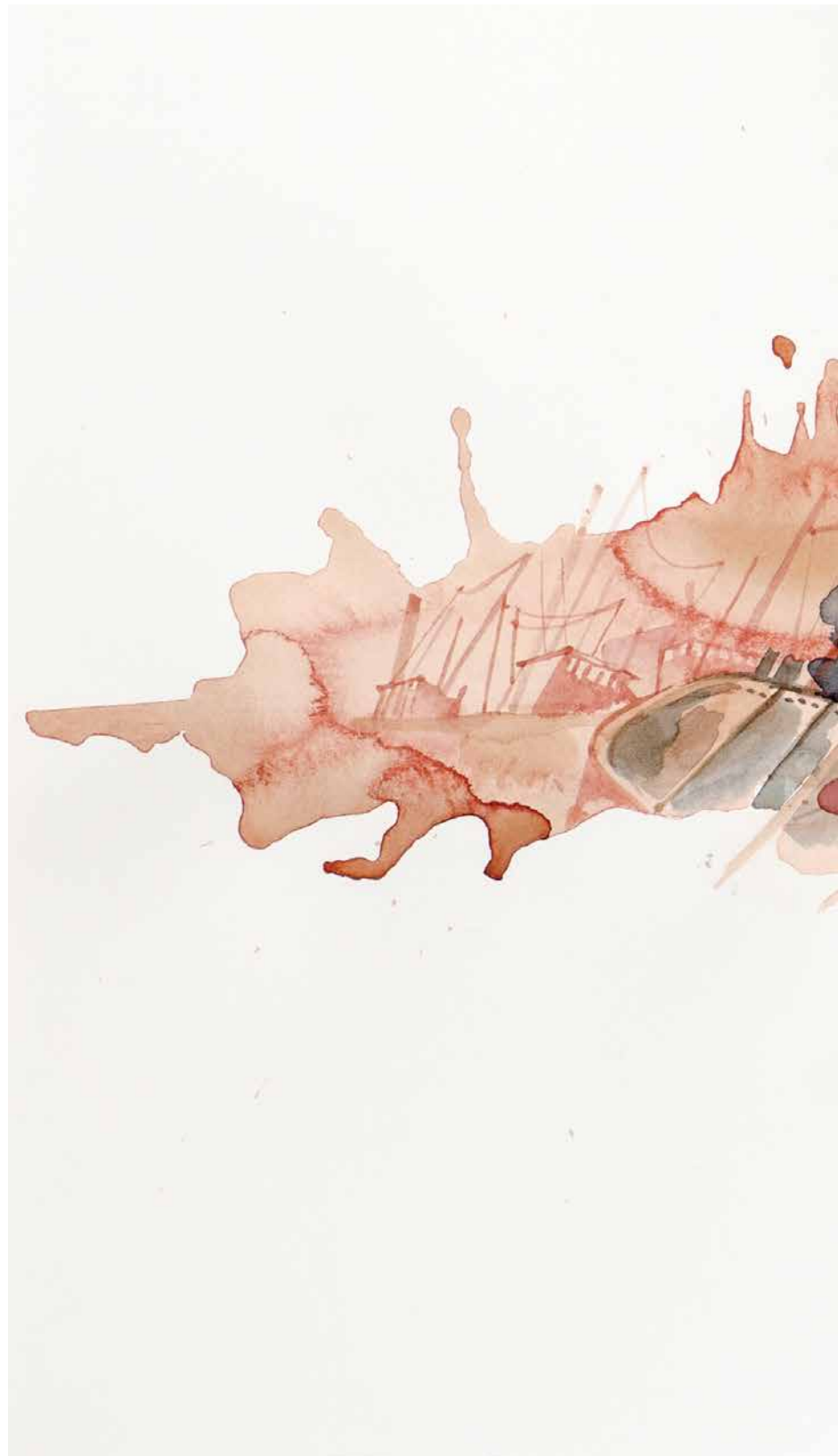
*Land-marked*  
2014  
Watercolour  
46 x 61cm





*Censored Sites/Sights*  
2014  
Watercolour  
30.5 x 40.6 cm

*The Land Itself*  
2014  
Watercolour  
46 x 61cm



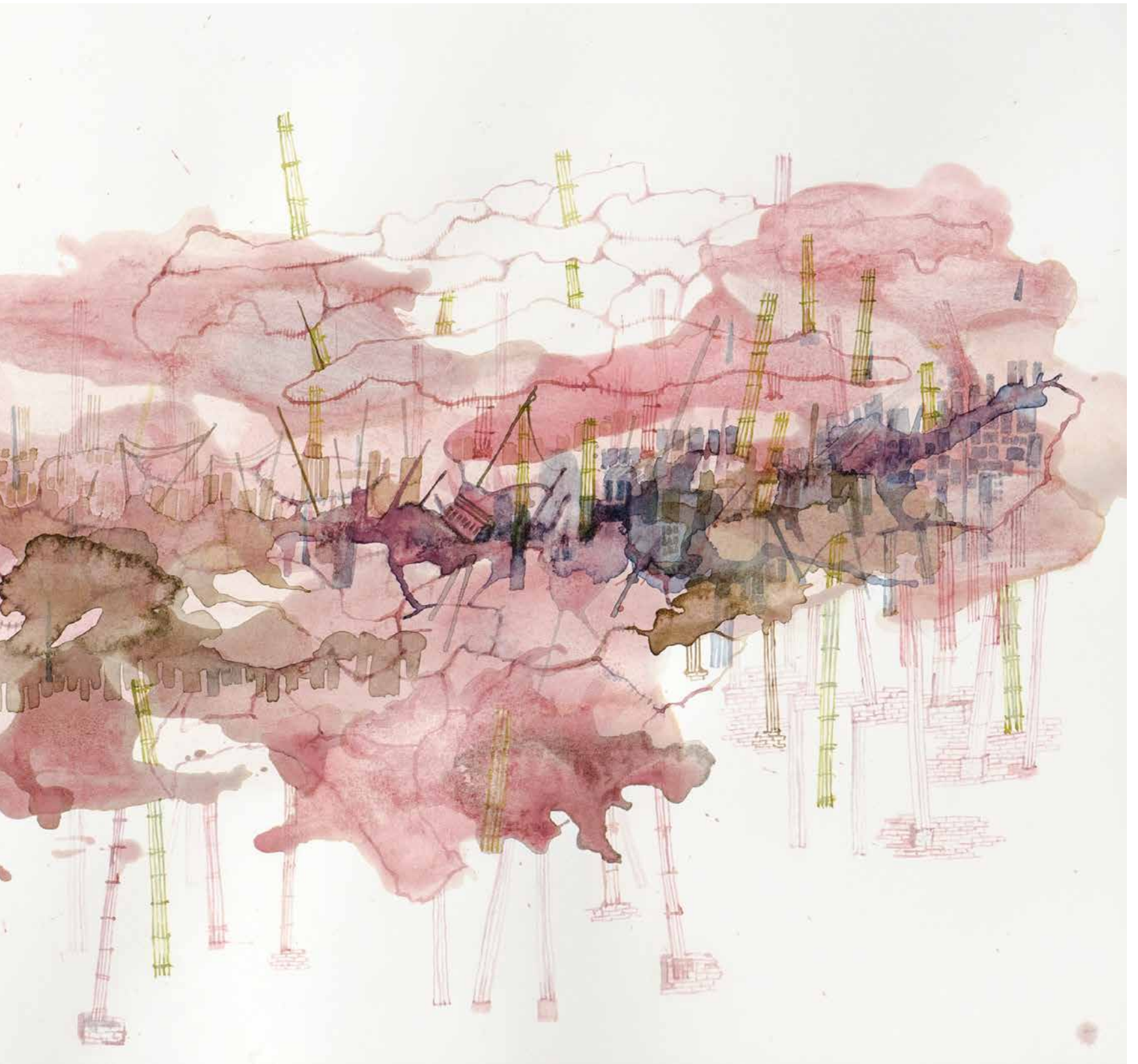




*Map-under-construction*  
2014  
Watercolour  
46 x 61cm







*Small Creatures Glowing in the Dark*  
2014  
Oil on canvas  
122 x 183 cm





# KURRACHEE



stars

stars

stars with a long tail

in the

painting (a faded

small crescent moon glowing in the darkness

stars

like tooth

until the lights go out

before the lights go out

in the

out

down from us

showing part of the

spiny blood

the boats







*An Invisible Landscape Conditions the Visible One*  
2011  
Oil on canvas  
122 x 152.5 cm

*How We Mark the Land Becomes Part of its History*  
2014  
Charcoal on Waterford paper  
118 x 153.5 cm







the main the land

Becomes part of the history

to the land  
in the land

continued along the coast from an old time  
This narrow mass of gravel dunes is about 25 feet high and on that  
... that offers any resistance to the dunes

... land has a small  
... that this land is all levels of  
... and  
... drawn

... the situation of water shows  
... feet of 14 feet square and the any long side  
... only defence against the battery is stones  
... of cotton canvas consequently the  
...  
...  
... buried out

...

...

...

*Merry-go-round*  
2012  
Charcoal, conte and acrylic on Fabriano paper  
118.5 x 153.5 cm









*Constellations Adrift* (detail)  
2014  
Objects cast in brass  
Dimensions variable



















(previous page)  
*Homage*  
2010  
Single channel video  
13 min 10 sec.

*The Observatory*  
2012  
Single channel video  
6 min.

## Secrets from the Nautical Almanac 1966

Upon entering the ruinous weather observatory (Manora Island, Karachi), I found many old manuscripts scattered on the floor. There were hand-written ledgers (dating back to 1916); detailed weather reports; tide tables that charted the movements of the Indian Ocean; and nautical almanacs from British India and post-Partition.

The nautical almanacs contained advertisements for communication equipment, life rafts, and navigational tools for the Pakistan Navy and Karachi Port Trust. These images were remarkable examples of a mid-1960s design aesthetic. They also seemed to veil the anxiety of Cold War surveillance, and to speak of a time before globalisation.

The almanac pages were bookworm-eaten, creating images of inverse islands in a solid sea. To this surface, I added fragments of speeches by General Ayub Khan (military dictator and president of Pakistan, 1958–1969). The text excerpts evoke his rhetoric of progress, open economy, and eventual war with India.

I sensed the potential of such varied elements drawn together within a single work. The bookworm itself felt like the most active agent—creating its own metanarrative through the pages. It was as though the period's transactional visions and utopian promises were being eaten away relentlessly.

Together with John Phillips at the londonprintstudio, I reconstructed the original images; separating the elements, ageing the paper with tea, reprinting the images and text, laser cutting the bitten narrative and, finally, employing the technique of *Chine-collé* to mount the delicate prints onto a larger support.

Naiza Khan, 2013





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*Secrets from the Nautical Almanac 1966*  
2013

*Chine-collé on Somerset paper*  
portfolio of 6 prints  
51 x 38 cm

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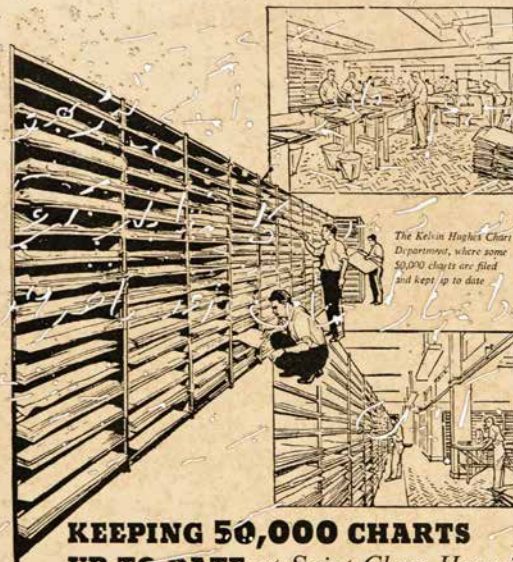
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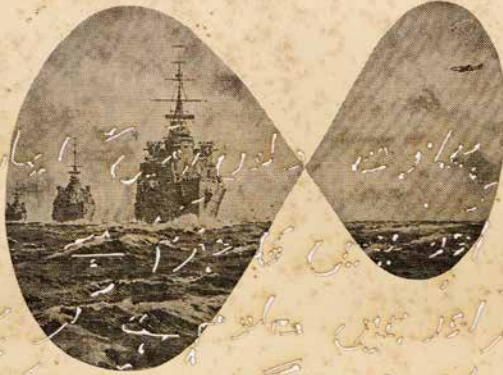


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*Secrets from the Nautical Almanac 1966* (detail)

2013

*Chine-collé* on Somerset paper

51 x 38 cm

(next page)

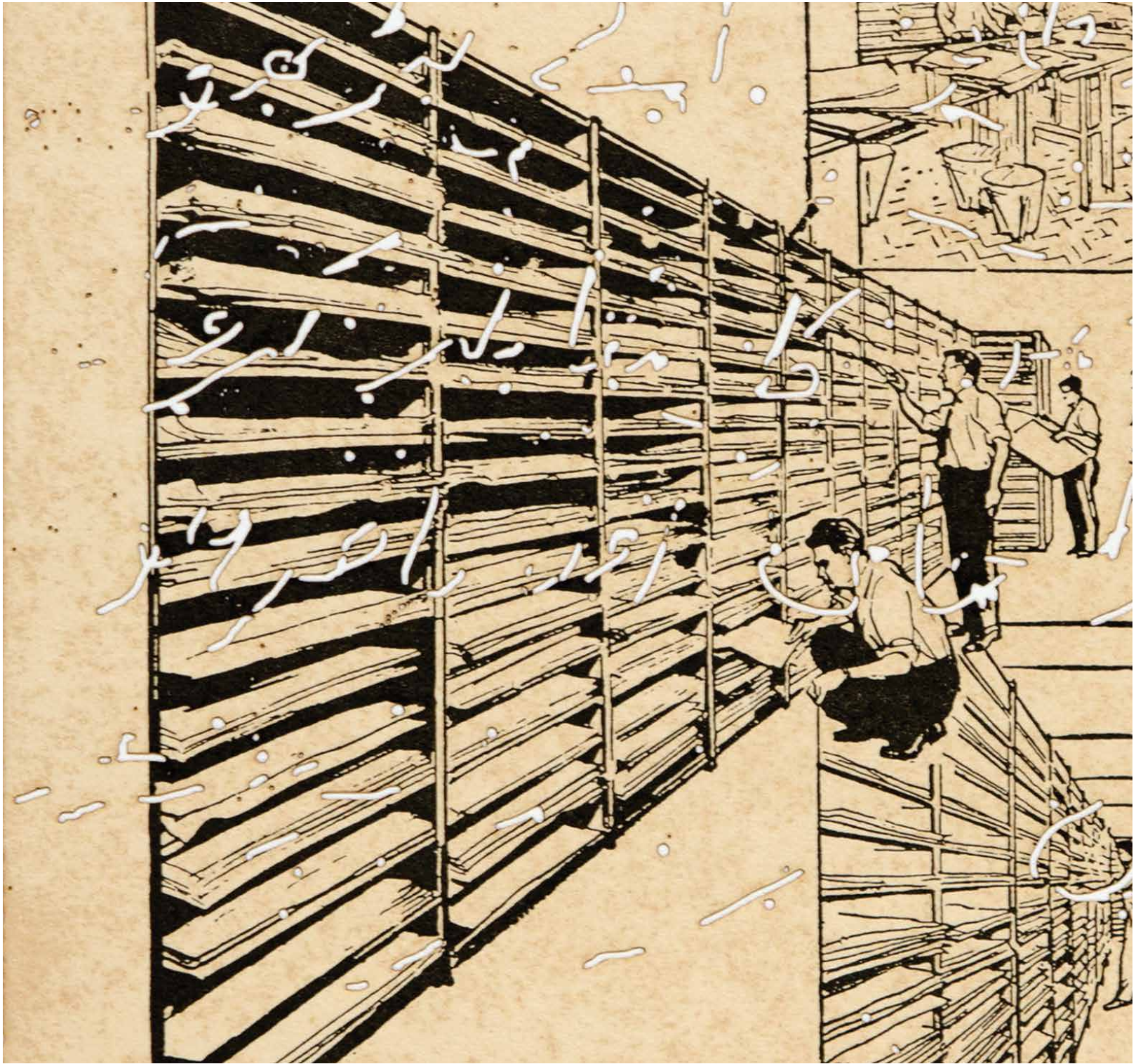
*Building Terrain I, II, and III*

2013

Digital C-type print

129.5 x 93 cm

















# Mobile Horizon: The Geography of Water

Naiza Khan in Conversation with Nada Raza

## Folio 1— Naiza Khan

These images have been selected from Naiza Khan's archive of photographs, visual research conducted over repeated visits to Manora and to fishing villages along the Karachi coastline from 2007–09. This lexicon of images has been referenced in recent bodies of her work. We decided to open up and excavate this material to share both how her research informs her studio practice, and how I as a curator might engage with that process and respond. We decided to have a documented conversation, simultaneously annotating a selection of images from her archive.

The text in blue is mine, and the black is Naiza's.

"Mobile Horizon: The Geography of Water" is the tentative title for a curatorial project I am currently researching.

.....

September 4, 2011

Dear Naiza,

Here is a first cut of images I'm sending to you, as I work through them and rearrange them to see what you think of the idea and format. I'll send you a draft version in the next few days to respond with your annotations. I think it's best to keep them informal, like notes, even fragments of sentences, quick instinctive responses. I've left out the chronology—I thought it was too much information and it's nicer to go back and forth, but you might want to add dates on pictures you comment on. I don't think we need to try and respond to every single image or sequence. I started off working in sequences of three, but I might play around with that.

Let me know what you think so far and if you want to Skype and chat about it.

Best,

Nada

.....

October 30, 2011

Dear Nada,

I spent 7 hours at Beijing airport...and at Burger King, had the luxury of a power point, hot coffee, and managed to write some more. But unfortunately, the Internet did not connect for long enough to send this to you.

In Dalian, where I was the next 5 nights, there was just no access to Internet during the conference.

So, here is something final. I feel I would like to add a last comment alongside your final reflections...and will do that when I get back to Karachi tomorrow night.

Best,

Naiza



Karachi harbour:

Images of architectural forms in water. Maritime landscapes... at a formal level, the architecture of the sea. Once the mouth or opening of the city to the world, now a decaying commercial port.

These images were shot on 14 September 2007, so exactly four years ago today.

The feeling of the water, laden heavy with so much rusting metal was a strange sensation when I cut across the straits of Manora in a small sailboat. Not like water should feel, because there could have been piles of shipwrecks below me; I saw this as a graveyard of ships. But actually they were trawlers that had sunk, fell in disrepair, neglected.

I would not say that it was/is a neglected port, in fact there is a lot of activity, and the nature of it keeps changing with the Navy vessels, the huge Chinese dredgers, the construction of a submarine hidden behind a black shed. Of course, photography is not permitted.

I was thinking about old ports and inevitable decay while watching a documentary on how the shipping container—an early open-source technology—completely changed the nature of the port itself and facilitated global trade at unprecedented volumes. So Port Qasim or Gwadar are now the commercial hubs with massive container terminals. While there may still be activity here, what you describe suggests that it is space that is guarded rather than accessible, the sea patrolled, vulnerable.



Local photo studio on Manora—an archive of images of naval officers and official events, inspections, award ceremonies and socials. Manora was part of the ancient city of Debal that guarded Sind from invaders, not quite an island but connected to the coast by a spit, which in colonial times became Sandspit, a beach with weekend huts (more to add on Manora's history later, check facts). Alexander is said to have been here? And for the last six decades, the Pakistan Navy.

I think you can find something about Alexander coming to these shores in Asif Farrukhi's book *Look at the City from Here*. It begins with the early history of Karachi, Manora Island and the story of Morriro and the whale...the city is rendered through the words of early explorers, writers and poets... I wonder why not visual artists?

Mohd Asif Jan opened this commercial photo studio in 1973. He told me about the pre-Partition English Cemetery around the corner. This has been built over more recently with a very unfortunate cement commercial block.

There did not seem to be a lot of business coming his way now.



I like the way you have stacked these images. I am seeing them in a new way... In the central image, there is a strange sexual dynamic; the Navy commodore inspecting the half-naked marines. He is in combat gear and they seem so vulnerable.

I agree with you. But is that not the nature of most military institutions? My uncle was a commodore and we made trips to Manora as children and I can only remember pristine white surfaces and playgrounds with perfect lines of *choona*... in fact could you add that image of naval uniforms drying on the ground? I'm not sure I copied it.



Yes, here are two images.

I love the connection here, the absence/presence of this image: the Navy *dhobi ghaat* on the open sand, the empty wet uniforms...and the images shot by Asif Jan with the dis-robed marines!

The memory you have of the Navy locality is still accurate. And now when I walk through Manora, the sparkly white *choona* and manicured hedges are in stark contrast to the rest of the island in decay. It is a different world around each bend of the road.

When I walk through this space it is very tangible, and I feel a sense of disjuncture.

It is a linear road, but the visual disruptions are so strong, with many things happening simultaneously. It is like a circular narrative. ....Certain kinds of transformations are at play, and I think this is because of the opacity and transparency of the space.

You mentioned a recent visit to meet with a new commodore on the island who might support a project there. I expressed my reservations, but there is a larger conversation here about how artists work in the public sphere. Others we know have quietly done commissions for the military. But nobody I know of (in Pakistan) has engaged their support to produce a critical work—I am now thinking about Zahoor ul Akhlaq's fish outside the Golf Club... it would be interesting to research how he and others

before him worked for the state... it seems he produced stamps for the government bearing the image of an Afghan child...

Yes, I agree, this is a unique possibility, and one I intend to pursue! To have the support of the Commodore, who seems to be very sympathetic to the needs of the civilian population, and who is entertaining the ideas/projects of a visual artist is very unusual.



Indian boats—a floating graveyard of captured boats of Indian fishermen who accidentally crossed over, tied together and left to die.

This was an incredible site/sight. Like an entire hybrid ecosystem that was prefab. Getting close to photograph these boats was not easy, I had to lie on my stomach, so the navy police would not see me and impound the boatman's license. I am still trying to think about how to deal with this image. It is again so full and heavy with narrative. I wish I could drag and drop this entire installation into another space so people can experience this site/sight.

Here is an image I made: *Floating Prisons* (screen print, watercolour and graphite on Fabriano paper—2010)

I met someone recently who works for Johnny Walker in the region and the conversation revealed what some of us already know—that ancient “smuggling” routes are still very much alive, flouting the national boundaries superimposed on the Indian Ocean, so sales of Black Label in Dubai are way higher than local consumption, much of it ends up on boats headed to Karachi or Makran... the Mumbai bombers travelled by boat. And there were urban legends when I lived in Dubai, of men who were in debt becoming castaways on the dhows that ply from Sharjah and Abu Dhabi.

Yes, and with these trade routes came the pollination of folklore and myths that have been carried across the waters. I feel stories disperse in different ways through the fisher folk community as opposed to across land. There are not so many borders to cross.

I feel Manora is suspended somewhere. It has been forgotten and no attempt has been made to envision its possible future for transformation. But at the same time there is something in the ruins. I see it in the multi-religious structures that still exist on the island, and the way the fishermen talk on the boats about stories caught at sea. These stories are worth recording, even if only in part.

I will go to Baba Bhit Island...the land rights to the Island were given to the residents at the time of the British. So this is a more settled community...lots of smugglers take refuge there.

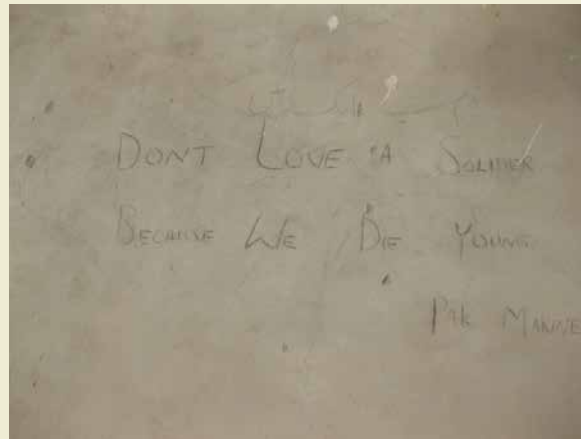




Photo Credit: Kamila Shamsie

You mean Baba and Bhit Islands? They called them *bara* and *chhota anda* (egg) if I remember correctly. I remember Captain Saleem the man who took us all crabbing in the harbour telling us that a certain famed gangster the neighbours would see extradited was the local hero... It all felt a bit Bollywood, the boys at the port, the *tindals* (boatboys) at the Yacht Club or hanging around the beach... they all used to have this groovy style, streaked hair and gold chains. Kasab meets Shahrukh Khan...

---



There is a lot to say about this wall of the Talpur fort, as seen from the most eastern tip of the island. Will write about this tomorrow. The long pier stretches out into the Arabian Sea, and I think about *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. I would really like to do something with this spot that juts out to sea. Imagine watching the horizon appear and disappear.

This façade of the original Talpur fort from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century is probably the only exposed part of the original fort that is intact. It was built by the Mirs of Talpur around 1759. Standing in the small cove, the wall is a sheer drop and there is a sense of drama established by the scale of the wall to the expanse of the sea.

They look like they might be on a pilgrimage to the temple. Sometimes it is tempting to deliberately misread images.

Yes, let's misread this image. They do look like they are on a pilgrimage to the temple. I feel I could create several narratives around these images, some real, some mythical. I am constantly tempted to wrap a narrative around the built structures,

especially the modern ruins of the KPT blocks that are marked for demolition. I have been thinking about locational works, using the island as a body, to draw across it in some way.



I have carried these images in my studio for over a year, thinking about what they mean and how I should find the subtext. The large oil painting *Between the Temple and the Playground* began as a response to these images.

This landscape offers no certainty.

Looking at the photographs of the burqa-clad, Balochi women, walking along the sea at Manora Island, it occurred to me that an image can aspire to mythical proportions. This photograph seems to hold a space that does not quite exist.

The duality of the elements that make up this painting re-locate this space and root it in another time-specific place, where time is compressed and stretched simultaneously. The land and sea becomes both a single mass and interchangeable. In this way they carry equal proportions of meaning. The texts (in the painting) offer leads from within the painting; not just towards the imagery, but to a process of working across the surface. The layers of paint are essential, like excavating each page of history that has come to these shores. This is not a landscape; it is more about the moving image, and an extension of temporality.

So I was thinking about this landscape/seascape as simultaneously a mythic and real experience.

Allegories are in the realm of thought like what ruins are in the realm of things.

It is through a certain visual tradition that we read ruins and in this case, behind the lens of a camera, are tempted to aestheticise them, to transform them. The line from Benjamin refers in particular to the imagery of the “baroque cult of the ruin” and the artistic arrangement of fragments or antiquity into believably constructed wholes. (Walter Benjamin, 1963, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*.)

I find your use of the doorways and windows in this sequence reminiscent of both classical compositions and more mundane travel photography... which carries the influence of the prints and photos by imperial “explorers” capturing landscapes in very particular ways, imposing a certain gravitas onto decaying architectural fragments, transforming them into monuments. Of course, we know that what is in the frame is just one version—that the photograph like all visual evidence can be manipulated... and we ourselves subconsciously follow the rules of classical compositions, even when just pointing an iPhone camera.



I think subconsciously, I was trying to find ways to monumentalise the non-monumental. These new ruins were sadder than the old ruins of the temple, church, lighthouse...and that says something about the relationship of these "modern" ruins and the temporality of contemporary life. I have sketched out many ideas in my notebooks of creating a monument to these "fallen" structures.

I know you've been looking into "ruins in reverse" since I mentioned it to you,



which has been a popular curatorial frame borrowed from Robert Smithson. He suggested that the modern urban sprawl was the modern inversion of the ruin with the latent potential for its own decay built in, and we are seeing that everywhere now, the empty carcasses of industrialisation, abandoned factories and workers' housing...



Yes, I have to explore this text further...and also the "Buried City" poems by N.M. Rashed. It is wonderful how certain texts gravitate toward visual constructions. When I was in NY in 2009, I saw this large billboard from the train, which read: "It is nothing to you, all ye who pass by." I found out later

this was a line from the "Lamentations." An epic poem about the city, personified as a women in grief over her fate, written anonymously in the 6th century.

It is hard not to read these images as works even though we have agreed that it is the documentary aspect we are dealing with... not just because elements you have used are recognisable, like this curvilinear fortress wall... Several images could go straight onto a gallery wall and I am tempted to interpret them as such.

The couple in the corner—are they on a date? A young married couple? Is it worth a mention? You talked a bit about your own visibility as an upper class woman with a camera and often your driver lurking nearby, your awareness of how you were perceived. Your position here is not neutral.





This couple seemed to have come to the farthest point they could possibly reach from Karachi city, to this secluded spot, sandwiched between the high wall and the sea...but to no avail, I shot an entire drama from the high ground! There are always young couples out for a date in Manora Island, it seems to be a popular dating destination.

You mentioned wanting to develop another site-specific work. There is a title on my shelf that you may want to read—Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another* on site-specific art and locational identity—that refers to community based art as "aesthetic evangelism." (Grant Kester) Also, if you look at the notes on this website from a conference I worked on where we talked to artists and officials about if the artist, when working in the urban realm when

supported by the administration, can really stand apart from the economy they attempt to resist... and the complex role of the curator within this model <http://www.contingencyofcuration.org/background/>

Maybe it is the way I have entered this space, or something about the island itself that draws me back to make work on the location itself. I think it is because this space is in an in-between state. Having been something, and not yet transformed into what it will be. Yes, there are a number of ideas that I have been fleshing out in relation to site-specific work.

The story of Muriro that formed part of the first body of work you did on Manora... and your bronze accumulations of toys and quotidian objects, flotsam and jetsam...





Yes, these sculptures *Small Worlds Collide* and *Fossil Clusters* continue, and have become more ambitious and intricate. What started off as something quite playful is now resonating with meanings that are beyond Manora. I am planning to monumentalise these objects in some way, so that through this random, playful connection, something may emerge.

We talked about this image—how it was a readymade... it reminded me of Jeff Wall, as do other images I picked out towards the end.

I found this minimal “arrangement” next to the new FB Public School.

But for me it is so much more than a ready-made.

This chair was part of the pile of old furniture that I found in the demolished school site (where the 3 children died in September 2009). It seems to be in detention.

---

The *durbeen walla*... It was strange, I went to the Folkestone Triennial last weekend and found echoes of these images. CAMP had a video installed in a British coastguard watching post of footage filmed from that vantage point. The lookout point, the vantage point, the best positions for surveillance... lighthouses, watchtowers on the English coast called a Martello. The need to see and identify and classify... the outline of a ship on the horizon... Is it a freighter? A warship? A trawler? It could be Indian or French, once a friend once an enemy... I went to Folkestone with a Maltese friend and I remember telling him that the first time I ever read the word MALTA it was on the hull of a ship in the Karachi harbour. I will email you my photos from Folkestone. I think you will enjoy them (including the Hew Locke piece I mentioned in the church!).





Many of the visitors who come to Manora beach arrive in boats across the straits, often making a long journey from the inner city of Karachi to gaze at the open sea. Everyone on the boats seems to anchor their gaze on the distant horizon. The *doorbeenwalas* on Manora beach offer these customers a view through their homemade telescopes for a mere Rs. 20. They seem to be directing our gaze to sights that are not visible to the naked eye...and at the same time, they are about our desire to possess something unattainable even for a short time.

What appealed to me is the stretch of vision they seem to give the ordinary customer, who can hold onto a visual through this lens and catch the distant vessels out at sea.



Kamila Shamsie was telling me about the Folkestone Triennial when we came to Manora in December 2009. She had recently been and was telling me how one wealthy entrepreneur and local of Folkestone had turned around the economy of this small, neglected seaside resort by supporting this event.

I have to add this image of a young man soaking in the winter sun in his undergarments! He was very chuffed when I asked to take a photo of him. He looked like a character out of Folkestone in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is how I have described him in my sketchbook notes from 2009.



I assumed this was a desecrated temple, with defaced “graven” images. I have seen one very similar to this, on a naval beach called Nathiagali, a bit further down on the Karachi coast. When you mentioned that it was in fact being renovated I was pleased, and then dismayed again when you mentioned that the ceramic tiles

(from the '30s I think) were being stripped away to restore its “original” glory... peeling back layers of history... replacing the traces of modern/popular culture with faux-cement-sandstone ancient-feel “authenticity”?

Yes, the Hindu Council has been restoring this for the past year, and the Sindhi tiles have all been stripped to bring the Hindu temple back to its original state.

*Ya Ali Madad/Coca Cola/Ya Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar*



I was struck by this arrangement of phrases on the hotel wall more than the more obvious contrast between the *mandir* and the clientele.

Yes! And the way that this globalised branding of COKE equalises the meanings ...the hierarchy is turned on its head.



The slides in this playground have now been demolished. I was always very impressed by these structures and how they had survived.





The discarded school and graveyard echo each other and I can see how your video piece evolved. Why do we need memorials, Naiza? Why do you feel the urge to create them? Are they not just gravestones, mere markers? The museum is a graveyard and all graveyards are museums...

The memorialising of a small, tragic incident in the video work *Homage* was a way to create something out of loss. So the ritual of painting the furniture a gravestone-blue colour was to re-build a connection out of the debris of the school/demolition site. I could empathise with the father Rahim Khan, whom I had met in the street on M Island one day. But it became more than that, as I saw beyond this tragedy, into the way this island has been transformed. And I realised there were connections here that I needed to articulate.

There is so much here that stares back at me repetitively; through the photographs, I kept seeing the skeleton of the buildings and the transparency of the space.





I arranged this last sequence in a hurry at what I thought was random and later noted that it had become a bit poetic, maybe even a bit silly... the solitary woman and the pye-dog... the aqua grave... what is a graven image? Do all images always contain meaning, unintentionally? I am getting trained to read image as a social text but often this exhausts me and I wonder how much of what I understand I have just made up. Should we stop asking for a narrative and just study the surface itself, or has that moment passed? Where you are painting from, was this ever possible? You talked about surface and enjoying painting a lot... the paintings have a discrete composition, containing only the information you have distilled. But then you open up your laptop and show me how much time you have spent trying to penetrate this space.

I think this last arrangement feels right to me...it has something very strong, which conveys a feeling of the space. The land-sea-horizon. Before we begin to look for the meaning, it is surface that comes together. We just don't hold onto that moment long enough... before meaning begins to wrap itself around the image.

I think there are many narratives at play in Manora, and these are visible in my paintings as well as the photographic archive. But, simultaneously, there is always a short span of time where an image can hold its own intension, independent of the narratives.

I think it is important to say here that I am also imposing a personal narrative, my subjectivity, my body, in the process of reclaiming this space.

But through painting, I am looking for surface that embodies a gesture which, at its best, is remembered and cannot be reclaimed in any other way.

I wanted to go through this exercise with you to address the notion that curation is simply a sum of strategies of display, to show how different arrangements can completely shift meaning and intention; how the addition of a new pair of eyes brings with it another set of impositions, of interpretations. One can be heavy handed, or have a light touch as they say. Has this been a good example of what lines these conversations can open?

I think it is also a way to think-aloud-together. A bit like playing badminton with our thoughts, so you catch some ideas and drop some notions.

....

September 18, 2011

Dear Nada,

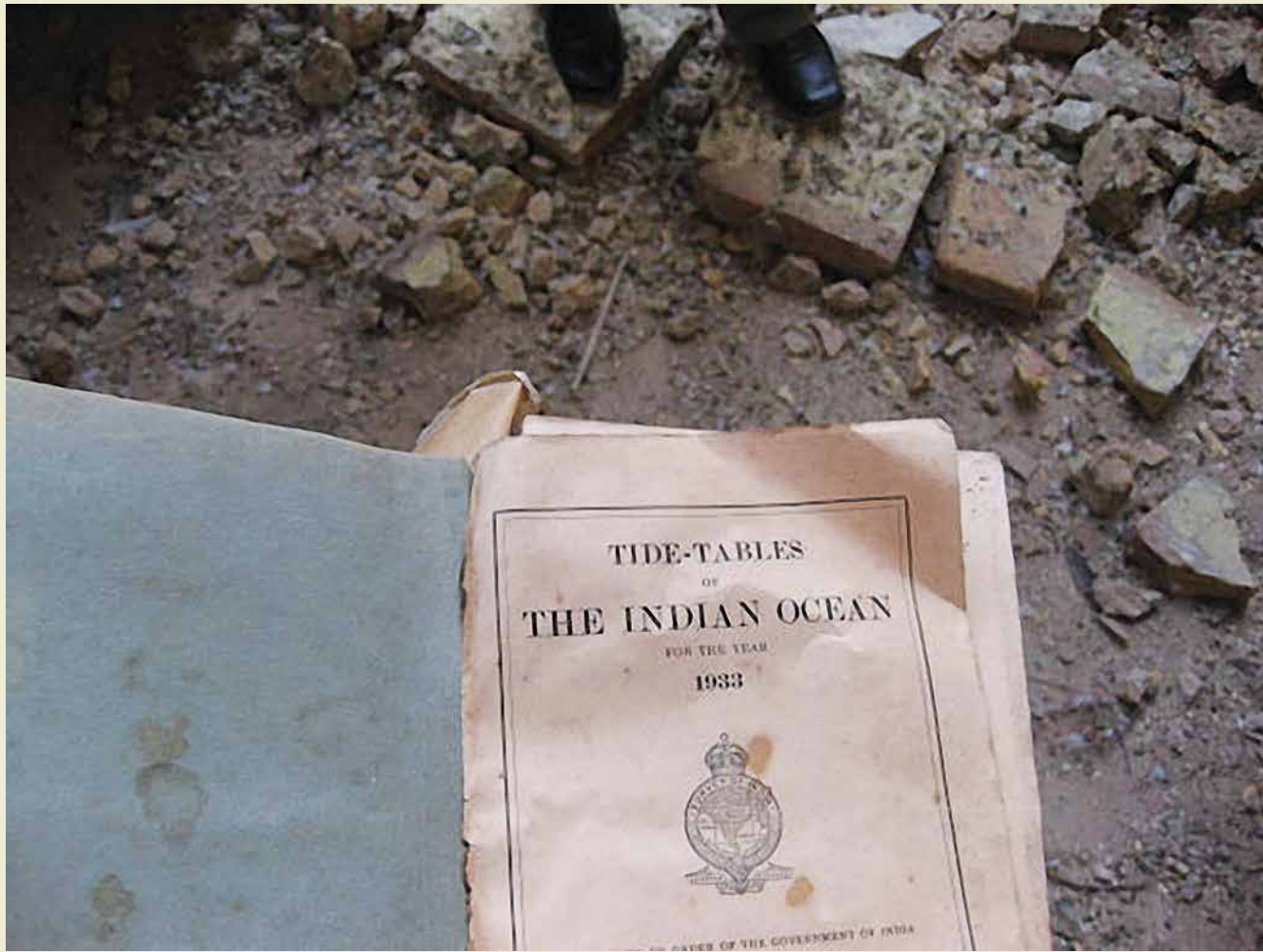
On Friday, I took Christophe, Asiya, and Sandeep to meet the Commodore at Manora. It was a visit full of revelations... perhaps the most interesting is a building that was the weather observatory on the island. A beautiful stone building; small, but with a tower. It belongs to the KPT and used to store the record of daily tidal changes on the island.

The second is that the Commodore said that there is a man on the island who has mapped out the underground tunnels from pre-colonial times. These tunnels were used to secretly carry the explosives against a possible attack on the fort. So much more.... and he is keen that we give suggestions for designs of the public toilets that they will make on the beach!

I took a really nice short video from the boat; I am sending some stills.

Best,

N



*This conversation was conducted between curator Nada Raza and Naiza Khan via email, over several months in 2011. It was first published in Sohbet—Journal of Contemporary Arts and Culture, Issue No.3, 2012.*







*Photo Credit: Arif Mahmood*

## Naiza Khan

### EDUCATION

1987–90

BFA Somerville College, University of Oxford  
Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art

1986–87

Foundation Course, Wimbledon School of Art, UK

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014

\*The Weight of Things, Koel Gallery, Karachi

2014

Disrupting the Alignment, Cooper Gallery, Dundee,  
Scotland

2013

In this Landscape, Sidney Cooper Gallery, Canterbury,  
UK

2013

Karachi Elegies, Broad Museum, Michigan

2010

\*Restore the Boundaries—The Manora Project, Rossi &  
Rossi at ARTDubai, Dubai

2008

\*The Skin She Wears, Rossi & Rossi Gallery, London

2008

\*Iron Clouds, Rohtas, Islamabad

2008

\*Iron Clouds, Rohtas II, Lahore

2007

\*Heavenly Ornaments, Canvas Gallery, Karachi

2006

\*bare the fact, bear the fact, Chemould Gallery,  
Mumbai

2004

\*Exhale, Canvas Gallery, Karachi

2000

Voices Merge, Chawkandi Art, Karachi

1995

La Linea Negra, Gallery 7, Hong Kong

1993

Points of Departure, Chawkandi Art, Karachi

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2013

\*Intimacy, Koel Gallery, Karachi

2012

\*9th Shanghai Biennale: Reactivation, Shanghai

2012

\*XV Donna Biennial: Art Decoding Violence, PAC  
Museum, Ferrara, Italy

2011

\*Amelia Johnson Gallery, Hong Kong

2010

Manifesta 8, Chamber of Public Secrets, Murcia, Spain

2010

\*Between Kismet and Karma, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds

2009

\*Hanging Fire, Asia Society Gallery and Museum,  
New York

2008

\*Desperately Seeking Paradise, ArtDubai, Dubai

2007

\*An Intensity of Space and Substance, Re-forming Landscape, Figurative Impulse, Inaugural show, National Art Gallery, Islamabad

2005

\*Layers of Time and Space, Ifa Gallery, Berlin/Stuttgart

2005

\*Beyond Borders, National Gallery of Modern Art, Bombay

2004

\*Living Masters - Young Voices, Alhamra, Lahore

2002

\*ArtSouthAsia, Harris Museum, Leeds

2000

\*Another Vision: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan, Brunei Gallery, London

\*catalogued shows

#### ARTIST RESIDENCIES

2012

Rybon Residency, Tehran

2003

Gasworks Residency, London

#### CURATORSHIPS

2010

The Rising Tide: New Directions in Art from Pakistan 1990-2010, Mohatta Palace Museum

2007

Drawing the Line, part of the inaugural show at National Art Gallery, Islamabad

2005

Co-curated Voices, Pakistan Development Forum, Islamabad

#### SELECTED CONFERENCES

2013

Speaker: Violence, Insurgencies, Deceptions: Conceptualising Urban Life in South Asia. Asia Research Institute, NUS, Singapore

2013

Speaker: Re-thinking Urban in Pakistan, NED University, Karachi. Organised by: South Asia Institute at University of Texas-Austin, American Institute of Pakistan Studies, Habib University & NED University of Engineering and Technology

2012

Speaker: What is the Pakistani Public? Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). Sponsored by the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS)

2011

Keynote Speaker: Risk and Revolution. IDRI International Drawing Research Institute, COFA. Conference held at Lu Xun Academy of Fine Art, Dalian, China

2011

Speaker: Between Kismet and Karma: South Asian Women Artists Respond to Conflict. Shisha, Leeds Art Gallery, UK

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2013

Naiza Khan: Works 1987-2013, Published by ArtAsiaPascific and the Broad Museum

2010

Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia, Iftikhar Dadi, published by UNC

2009

Comparing Cities: Edited by Kamran Ali & Martina Rieker. Essay: Ghostly Sufis and Ornamental Shadows: Spectral Visualities in Karachi's Public Sphere by Iftikhar Dadi. Oxford University Press, Pakistan

2007

Memory, Metaphor, Mutations—The Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan, Salima Hashmi and Yashodara Dalmia, Oxford University Press

2007

Women, Gender Representations of Sexualities and Gender in the Visual Arts, Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures (Volume 5) Ed. Suad Joseph

2005

Art and Social Change, Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific, edited by Caroline Turner, pub. Pandanus Books

2002

Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan, Salima Hashmi

1997

50 Years of Visual Arts in Pakistan, Salima Hashmi and Quddus Mirza

#### AWARDS

2013

Prince Claus Laureate, Netherlands

2013

Tehzeeb Foundation Awards, Pakistan

2011

Pakistan Lecture Series, AIPS, USA

2009

Women of Strength Award, TV One, Pakistan

2006

7th Bharat Bhavan International Biennial of Print, India

2003

Prize, 43rd Premio Suzzara, Italy

2003

National Excellence Award, 8th National Exb. Visual Arts, Pakistan

2002

1st Unilever Lux Award for Visual Artist, Pakistan

#### SELECTED PUBLISHED ESSAYS

2012

Art Spaces Directory: Mobility and Exchange, Creative Discourses Across Borders. Published by AAP and New Museum, NY

2010

The Rising Tide: catalogue essay alongside the exhibition. Published by Mohatta Palace Museum

2009

Henna Hands. Mazaar, Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan. Published by Oxford University Press, Karachi with the Price Claus Fund.

2009

Through the Lens of the Political: Asian Art Archive HK. Perspectives Sept. issue. Power to the Artist: Pakistan Report. ArtAsiaPacific 10 year Almanac

Naiza Khan is currently Professional Advisor at the Department of Visual Studies, University of Karachi.

Khan is also a member of the Board of Governors, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture.

[www.naizakhan.com](http://www.naizakhan.com)



## Works in the Exhibition



*Fossilised Land*  
2014  
Watercolour  
46 x 61 cm



*Land-marked*  
2014  
Watercolour  
46 x 61 cm



*Censored Sites/Sights*  
2014  
Watercolour  
30.5 x 40.6 cm



*The Land Itself*  
2014  
Watercolour  
46 x 61 cm



*Map-under-construction*  
2014  
Watercolour  
46 x 61 cm



*Small Creatures Glowing  
in the Dark*  
2014  
Oil on canvas  
122 x 183 cm



*An Invisible Landscape  
Conditions the Visible One*  
2011  
Oil on canvas  
122 x 152.5 cm



*How We Mark the Land  
Becomes Part of its History*  
2014  
Charcoal on Waterford paper  
118 x 153.5 cm



*Merry-go-round*  
2012  
Charcoal, conte and  
acrylic on Fabriano paper  
118.5 x 153.5 cm



*Constellations Adrift  
(detail)*  
2014  
Objects cast in brass  
Dimensions variable



*Homage*  
2010  
Video 13 min 10 sec.



*The Observatory*  
2012  
Video 6 min.



*Secrets from the Nautical Almanac 1966*  
2013  
Chine-collé on Somerset paper  
51 x 38 cm



*Secrets from the Nautical Almanac 1966*  
2013  
Chine-collé on Somerset paper  
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2013  
Chine-collé on Somerset paper  
51 x 38 cm



*Building Terrain I*  
2013  
Digital C-type print  
129.5 x 93 cm



*Building Terrain II*  
2013  
Digital C-type print  
129.5 x 93 cm



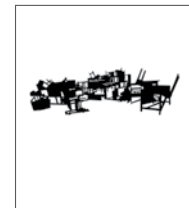
*Building Terrain III*  
2013  
Digital C-type print  
129.5 x 93 cm



*The Scattering*  
2013  
Screen print on Magnani paper  
70 x 100 cm



*Drawing towards an Installation for Moriro's Fossil*  
2009  
Acrylic on paper  
44 x 38 cm



*The Pile*  
2010  
Relief print on Somerset paper  
57 x 75.5 cm

First published as part of the exhibition:

## The Weight of Things

Koel Gallery, Karachi  
23 January–10 February 2014

On the occasion of the Prince Clause Award, a part of this exhibition will travel to:  
National Gallery of Art, Islamabad  
NCA Gallery, Lahore

With thanks:  
H. E. Marcel de Vink, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Noorjehan Bilgrami

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Sara Suleman

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(cover image)  
*The Scattering*  
2013  
Screen print on Magnani paper  
70 x 100 cm



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Kingdom of the Netherlands



(following page)

*The Pile*

2010

Relief print on Somerset paper

57 x 75.5 cm

*Drawing towards an*

*Installation for Moriro's*

*Fossil*

2009

Acrylic on paper

44 x 38 cm

MORRERO'S glass capsule  
found 250 years on... →

mythological fossil  
cluster made of  
metal, glass, debris  
from the sea, shells  
sea weed -- stories

a gigantic  
fossil

the fisherman got deep into the whirl pool  
and killed the shark of desire.  
Now their eyes beam with joy.

