

THE MISSING SLATE

For the discerning metropolitan.

FALL 2010



THE MISSING SLATE TEAM

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Nando's menu has to be one of the most creative menus I've seen for a while in Pakistan. Witty, engaging and just a tad bit cheeky, it is an experience in of itself. The sauce tray is interestingly different; everything about this place is wacky and slightly off kilter and I get the impression that it's meant to be, but it doesn't come off affected. So what you're left with is a creative experience before the first course is served and based on the menu, I'd be lying if I said it didn't whet my appetite.

True, this isn't the most conventional of editor letters but the cover of this issue is kinda like the menu, and the first issue is the first course. It is my sincerest hope that you enjoy these global voices, united under a single banner of art, creative thought and expression.

The team at The Missing Slate is here to tell you that we are bringing a platform that simply doesn't exist. Anywhere. Online or off. An open, engaging, cross cultural, cross border communication stream ranging writers from countries as diverse as Pakistan, Australia, the United States and Israel. Our feature articles open up a healthy, intellectual debate on whether art and religion (more specifically, Islam) can co-exist and the sensationalism in both media and print journalism that has turned news into reality TV, warts and all. These are framed by the importance of maintaining creative integrity in a world of reduced concentration, a discussion on self publication and its various perils, the red tape that stops income from trickling downwards to important spheres and a profile on the Pakistani Youth Alliance; an important group of youngsters going out there and making a difference, and other important issues and commentaries. These in turn are sprinkled over with a collection of poetry and fiction, which in turn are matched to the inspiring visuals of Babar Moghal, our spotlight artist.

Before continuing, I find it absolutely imperative to give a special shout out to our very dedicated creative team: Syed Hassan Sagheer, Nabihah Zeeshan and Moeed Tariq who took on the challenge of bringing TMS from a concept to a visually arresting work of art. But TMS is nothing without the sum of its parts: editors, writers, artists and creatives have come together to create something truly amazing.

The very existence of The Missing Slate is a shout out to the importance of art, literature and independent thought, not just in Pakistan, but in the world at large. The floods may have put this nation back decades, but we are only as good as our unity and commitment to change above all else.

If you like what you see, spread the word about us: share an article, tweet or blog about The Missing Slate. And if you're really looking to get you and your ideas out there, submit your work!

But whether you're casual readers, avid writers or both, enjoy!

Sincerely,

Maryam Piracha

Editor-in-Chief, The Missing Slate

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T2F ~ THE SECOND FLOOR

By Tehniat Aftab

Creative artistic spaces.

“A community space for open dialogue, T2F provides citizens with a platform for social change through rich cultural activities, public discourse, and advocacy using progressive ideas and the new media,” PeaceNiche(parent organisation of T2F).

The thing that needs to be understood about The Second Floor (T2F) is that it's not just a café. Well, it is but it's so much more, from its wealth of books and magazines, board games, puzzles and free wi-fi, it is as so many of its patrons feel, a second home. A place where you can kick off your shoes and enjoy the great company, coffee and of course, the food!

Situated in Karachi, Defence Phase 2 (ext), the café offers reasonably priced homemade menu items, including scrumptious sandwiches: moist and juicy pepper chicken, hunter beef and “The Grilled Cheese Flying Saucer” are just a few of the options on display. While there are a variety of steaming hot beverages to choose from—from espressos to cappuccinos to hot chocolate— T2F is best known for its baked goodies. Rich, delicious chocolate cupcakes, peanut butter cookies, oatmeal & chocolate chip cookies and banana bread. It also offers an all day breakfast – with omelet, frenchtoast, granola and milk. The café management assures us that everything in their kitchen is made from scratch and with handpicked ingredients—the coffee freshly brewed, and bread and cookies freshly baked everyday at the café.

The ambience and atmosphere of T2F is warm, comfortable and welcoming. The café has a light, contemporary look: brown polished furniture, orange walls, and is plenty spacious. The café also features events for students and other young people to participate in and attend. There are training sessions, tabla classes, drawing and art classes, classical singing classics, photography workshops, comedy nights, karaoke nights, book launches and a whole lot more. There have been over a hundred different events and workshops at T2F: photography and design exhibitions, discussions, talks, poetry readings, musical sessions, theatre performances etc. Artists, writers and intellectuals are often found here engaged in healthy discussion and debate, writing their grand masterpieces of tomorrow or merely enjoying the ambience.

The Second Floor also features a bookstore, with over 500 books on various subjects: politics, fiction, poetry, science, art, design and novels. It also has a selection of rare contemporary



ROVING EYE

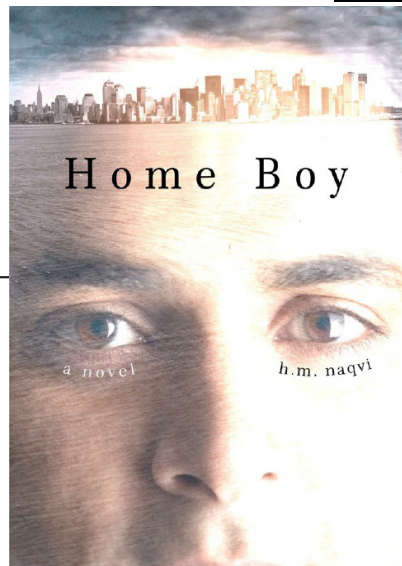
The Critics

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Urdu novels and poetry. One of the more interesting elements of the café is the bathroom blackboard; its purpose being to allow its customers to indulge in artistic, creative whimsy. The café also hosts its own gallery—Farrar Art Gallery—which serves as a platform for new and emerging artists & photographers.

The Second Floor is a place for the intellectually inclined and visually arresting artists, poets and writers of today. With its good food, coffee and focus on constantly engaging healthy discussion and debate, it is exactly what the city and country need. Here's hoping cafes in Lahore and Islamabad follow suit. It might help increase the impact of the intellectual and creative elite, if an increasing number of establishments sat up and took notice of the talent growing in their back yard.





HOME BOY

September 11, 2001. New York City.

By Madiha Riaz

New York lives and breathes in this book, is the conclusion one comes to after completing H.M. Naqvi's debut; a breath of fresh air in the young Pakistani literary scene. Readers are swept onto the streets of New York through the eyes of its protagonist, Chuck—a young, twenty-something who, like the city he inhabits—is rapidly changing guises (and perceptions). A grad student at NYU; an investment banker on Wall Street; a cabbie—he is a chameleon, flawlessly morphing at a moment's notice.

Naqvi's New York is so much more than the cardboard cutouts and whimsical watercolors Hollywood has imbued us with; more like a pop-out, life sized work of art. At its heart lies the tale of a life of transitions for Muslims, that, after the fateful events of 9/11 resonates viv-

idly in 2010. Perhaps more than it did when it was first written.

Flanked by his newfound friends, his *homeboys*—A.C, a Pakistani-Punjabi rapper and teacher extraordinaire and Jimbo, an Afghan-Pakistani DJ—Chuck sets off exploring his adopted city. The exploration soon turns into a search for Muhammad “The Shahman” Shah, a friend who has mysteriously disappeared in the wake of 9/11. Things go steadily downhill from here, with the FBI knocking down their door, and escorting all three off into seedy dungeons. Arguably the best (and most heartbreaking) passages of *Homeboy* are those written about their imprisonment. Interrogation and confinement come alive, salting a wound that is still fresh for many South Asian Muslims; inextricably linked as they

are to a crime they did not commit.

In most novels ancestry is transcendental, but not for the work of South Asians. Indeed, it's in places where the author has nailed a feeling or a common cultural reference, that the book transcends its pages and becomes real. Secondary characters like Amo, Jimbo's teenaged sister, with her hijab and shy ways, are believable. But if one is to truly applaud *Homeboy's* storytelling, one need look no further than Dora or “Duck”; Jimbo's flamboyant girlfriend as she emerges blonde-haired and blue eyed from the book.

As in novels written by other South Asian authors, there are plenty of food references (Nadeem Aslam's mouth watering descriptions in *Maps for Lost Lovers* comes to mind) and Naqvi doesn't stray from this apparent convention. *Homeboy* is rich with mentions of mutton biryani, seekh kebabs and gulab jammuns. Pakistanis know that to truly confer honor and love to anything, it is appropriate that an offer of food be made. Naqvi does that and more in his ode to New York.

The story ends in prayer and the recognition of a single truth: while we stray from our spiritual roots in everyday life, in our time of need, desperation and confusion, we claw our way back. We leave to the unknown what we can't make sense of and we pray because, ultimately, we have nothing left to lose.

4 SYNECDOCHE

By Bilal Iqbal

Time. Time. Time. Lights, camera, action.

“That’s what I want to explore. We’re all hurtling towards death, yet here we are for the moment, alive. Each of us knowing we’re going to die, each of us secretly believing we won’t”- Caden

Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman), a talented theatre director, is not happy with his plays. They incorporate elaborate setups that pale in comparison to his wife’s miniature paintings. He is also desperately trying to hold on to his broken relationship with her while his body, crippled by a neurological degradation, starts to breakdown.

But to leave it at that would be far too unambitious for the debutant director Charlie Kaufman, who has penned gems like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Adaptation*.

At its simplest, the movie is Caden’s life story. What gives the movie its depth is his ambition. Receiving a MacArthur Fellowship allows him to attempt something he can pour his entire being into: a large-scale production, staged in a warehouse, attempting to recreate and capture the lives of the people living in New York.

Synecdoche, New York aims high and eschews cheap, or for that matter easy, entertainment. It refuses to wait for its viewer to catch up and is chock-full of Kaufman’s trademark mind twisters— spelled out, in this particular case, in the form of recursive loops. Caden’s life itself becomes one of the many

stories in the warehouse, seen from a third person’s viewpoint that itself is a perspective staged for Caden (and his audience), which – the extension logically follows – is staged for a film that we are seeing.

A recurring motif in the film is time—or the absence of it, at least for its protagonist.

Caden, and through him the viewers, are constantly reminded of the passing time, yet it seems to stand still as, a minister in his magnum opus observes, we “wait in vain, wasting years, for a phone call or a letter or a look from someone or something to make it all right. And it never comes or it seems to but it doesn’t really.”

Three months, now six, a year and so the play keeps on growing bigger and bigger as actors live out their characters in that huge bubble of a warehouse that eventually replaces New York itself.

We wait patiently, watching Caden’s life unfold, as he puts all of himself into the production, trying desperately to figure out how he wants to the play to be done. As he remarks at one point, “There are nearly thirteen million people in the world. None of those people is an extra. They’re all the leads of their own stories. They have to be given their due.”

It is this anticipation of the scale and the impossibility of the task that gives the viewer the power, and the will, to go through the bleak mess that is Caden’s life. We watch as he attempts to replace the people he has lost, as he puts his own character into the play, as he watches his doppelganger fall to his death. And we watch as he eventually lets go of his identity and assumes the character of his wife’s cleaning lady in the play— his idea of happiness, or at the very least, an escape from his miserable self.

Synecdoche, New York leaves you empty and exhausted. It leaves you with a sense of despair and, perhaps, anger. This is no mindless blockbuster. It will fill your mind with questions, thoughts and ideas; and for this reason alone *Synecdoche, New York* is a triumph.



MAINTAINING CREATIVE INTEGRITY

By Gareth Trew

The work of writers and poets stands at the precipice of self-defeat.

One of the challenges facing emerging artists – increasingly as art becomes less about self expression and more about marketability – is maintaining our creative integrity. Far too often, we allow our work to be diluted or even disregarded, perhaps because it breaks the current norms too drastically, or due to negative feedback from a more successful artist in the field. If original, exciting work is to be created, it's imperative we feel free to take risks.

The incredible diversity of art is undoubtedly one of its most interesting aspects. Take poetry, for example. Poets not only write on every conceivable subject, but do it through a myriad of different forms: haiku and other Eastern poetry; traditional fixed form poetry; visual poetry; contemporary free verse poetry; the list goes on. Then there is the variation provided simply by the poet's individuality. We can read a dozen contemporary free verse pieces about a failed

relationship and be touched by each one of them, because they are all as unique as the people who wrote them. This distinguishing difference is frequently jeopardised, especially in the case of young and emerging artists. Because they are more easily caught in the trap of creating art the way they have been advised to instead of following their instincts, they lose one of their most valuable tools – their own voice – which can be very difficult to rediscover. The resulting work is often insipid and commercial, not to mention extremely dissatisfying for the artist. In high-school, for instance, poetry was marked largely on how many poetic devices (rhyme, metre, metaphor, etc) could be incorporated into a piece. I was handicapped by this mindset even years later, to the point that I would change a really effective line simply because an alternative word would create alliteration. It took me a long time to realise why I was unhappy with the poems I was writing.

This is not to say, of course, that we should not allow any outside input into our work. Criticism, when given constructively, is immensely useful – even a single objective response can revolutionise a piece. A good group – be it for writing, theatre or any other field – is an excellent resource because as well as receiving feedback on their own work, participants also digest and assess the work of their peers and art often inspires art. Likewise, a degree of

ODE

By Mike Berteaux

To Nature's Select™ Brand Pet Food

O boundless men, of salmon and of vegetable,
your wares are Samoyed smiles with coats that glow.

I'll purchase in bulk, if I am able.

Lamb and rice goodies were once a fable
in the world of breeding dogs for show.
Sing praises to boundless men, of salmon and of
vegetable!

Shelties of black, tri-color, and sable,
the cuddliest pups that your bitches can throw.
I'll buy the whole litter, if I am able.

"Ninety percent lean," if one can believe the label.

Who can match prices this low
besides boundless men? Salmon and vegetable

waste products are guaranteed biodegradable.
(Shit becomes compost, as everyone knows!)

I'll buy it wholesale, if I am able.

Wet noses and tail wags are invaluable.

What recompense can an owner bestow?

O boundless men, of salmon and of vegetable,
I'll buy out your stock, if I am able.



Babar Moghal 2009 - Oil on Canvas

Mike Berteaux is a 28-year-old Japanese-Mexican-Anglo-American. He studied English and editing at Brigham Young University and worked on the staff of his school's award-winning creative writing journal, Inscape. His poems have been published in Clearfield Review and The Missing Slate. He writes best after midnight, but works best after a full night's sleep.

marketability obviously needs to be considered if an artist plans to pursue a professional career – business sense is a necessity of successful business, and the purest creative integrity cannot negate that

fact. Some flexibility, then, is key. If we stick too rigidly to our vision for a piece and do not allow for any potential development, the work can feel stagnant and uninspired. Furthermore, if we take so

strict an approach with every piece, then our work will likely be too much the same.

Our vision for a piece is vital but by no means sufficient in itself – an enormous amount of work is required to

create good art. Even the smallest detail can be impossibly agonising. I generally write several drafts of whatever I'm working on – be it poem, play, article or other – and have many times mulled all week over the wording of a single phrase. Often, I also have to rest a piece even for a couple of months before I can come back to it and edit satisfactorily. Whilst the number of drafts and amount of editing needed will vary from person to person and piece to piece, this work ethic I think is essential. If we don't pay close attention to detail, what we are left with will be underprepared and generic, and it's a real pity to see a potentially great idea ruined by laziness.

So, outside influence often proves either a great danger or an opportunity for development. In any case, it is imperative that throughout the creative process, we keep hold of what we're trying to achieve with each piece and not allow criticism or commercialism to overwhelm us, and we must do so unapologetically. We owe it to ourselves to protect the creative integrity of our work, because there are plenty of people who would take it away without a second thought.

Gareth Trew is a young, Australian writer whose chief passion is poetry; his poems have been published in various print and online journals.

PUBLICATION... ON LSD

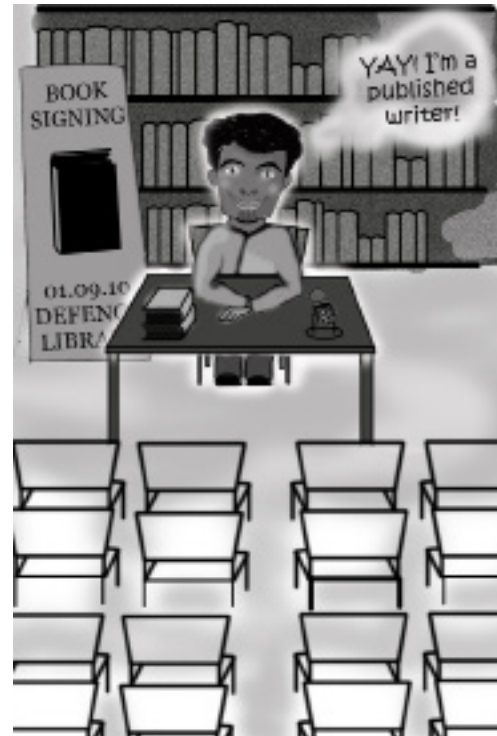
By Maryam Piracha

Researched by Raiya Mansoor

No, not everyone's an author.

When I initially flipped open the cover and started reading first time author, Khadija Khan's *The Mind of Q*, it was with some trepidation and borderline excitement. That was then. Three pages in, reminded as I was by O-level grade English essays...and not the good kind, I backtracked to see who in their right minds would publish and/or support such talentless drivel (the book seems to have garnered outstanding reviews in local media). In retrospect, media critics should be lynched! When I spotted the publisher's name, it all

made perfect sense: Lulu. Lulu is one of the more established names in a specialized business that's made its money on the belief that everyone's got a book in them: Print on Demand publication, or as it's known within lit-



erary circles, “vanity publication”.

The book was fraught with multiple issues, from the differing fonts spread across the document to the dubious structure or lack thereof; to poor characterization and the inability to set the stage and adequately build up a scene; to the understanding that had it been substantially and professionally edited, there would be a marked difference between each character's voice, instead of a monotonous homogeneity that spread across the book. There is a reason why the publication business is not an easy one to break into (unless of course, you're Sarah Palin and you can afford to hire a ghostwriter), and why it is fact...not fiction, that not everyone's a writer.

PoD publication allows writers to pay the so called “publication houses” to publish their book; while would-be authors handle the book's layout, cover and marketing and such additional services like editing and copywriting cost extra. ISBN numbers are now also provided by all PoD establishments. The largest

8 PoD outfits are Lulu, AuthorHouse (although its “authors” claim they were ripped off...not unlike the feeling their readers must get), Amazon’s CreateSpace service (Kiyani Yousaf, another Pakistani author recently “published” What If with them), Trafford Publishing and the list goes on. The name “PoD” comes from paying for as many copies as you’d like to have printed. For the purposes of recipe and cook books and perhaps the odd family tree history or two, it’s a great bargain. Not so much for mainstream novels which need to go through the publication machine; editors value books based on their market appeal and whether it would be profitable for them to publish such a novel, for social, political, and pure aesthetic appeal. PoD books rarely fit the bill and with good reason.

Mainstream publishing houses, literary publications, book critics and freelance writers whose job it is to review books, normally place PoD self published books on the slush pile (The New York Times refuses to review vanity publications). Why? Plagued by typos, editorial gaffes, poor structure and in the case of fiction, characterization, plot holes, messy dialogs (from this writer’s reading, The Mind of Q ticks the boxes of all the above), PoD self publications present an overall lack of professionalism in the finished product. The author claims Al Hamra (the sole publisher she approached in Pakistan) rejected her because of her age. That’s not a good enough excuse, sorry...Kamila Shamsie was 23 when she published *City by the Sea* which was much, much more polished than the PoD *Q*. Sure, there are the occasional hits in PoD publications, but those are few and far between.

Authors claim that traditional publication houses reject them, citing examples of D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and in case of local publications, Bapsi Sidhwa without realizing they’re pooping on their own argument. There is a marked difference between Print on Demand vanity publication and traditional or “true” self publication, which is largely dead. Lawrence was given no other choice in a censored England, when he self published *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*. The man went directly to

the printing press and undertook full responsibility for its publication. Similarly, Woolf’s dilemma had more to do with her stream-of-consciousness style which she published through the publication house jointly owned by herself and her husband. Hogarth Press subsequently provided the channels for other writers facing the same issues. Ms Sidhwa on the other hand, was working in an environment that simply didn’t allow women to write in English. She peddled her book to one bookstore after another, asking them to stock the now bestselling *The Crow Eaters* on their shelves. It was a trying effort, to put it lightly.

True, not every traditionally published author is brilliant (case in point, Dan Brown and Stephanie Meyer) and there are quite a few losers out there, but PoD will unleash more than what discerning readers deserve.

The business of writing isn’t about getting published: it’s about making a difference in the lives of your readers. Anything less than that, isn’t worth aspiring to.

Writers, if they choose to go into the profession, must contend with a life of rejection without opting for the easy way out. Because as long as you can pay, outfits will publish your work and if your sole ambition in life is to be published, then Praise the Lohd, Hallelujah you have an ansah! *cue doves and choir music* But if you are writing with a purpose and with the belief that you hold something truly important, there are other options. Send your work to international literary journals (a full list is available at Duotrope.com), consider small presses (independent publishers who are still selective, but don’t require you to pay for the services) and strive to get your work out there. The Internet Age was made for the success of small time people with big time dreams like ourselves. Put up samples of your work on the net, see what sort of reviews and feedback you get. Chances are, if you’re liked by more than your friends and a handful of people, you’re not going to need to pay your way into publication glory.

THE PRICE OF TEA

By Madeeha Ansari

Chartering a land of red tape.

I wondered what he would look like. In my head, he was the thick-voiced embodiment of corruption and malpractice. Middle-aged, balding, with an ample belly and a large ring on one finger. In he would stride with an important-looking list on which he'd tick off the ladies' names and take charge of their business.

"Don't give your documents to anyone," he had said on the phone. "I'll be there directly."

Unfortunately for him, he was up against someone with her first point to prove upon her return to Pakistan. So we ignored the telephonic instructions, smiled at the gentleman behind the counter of the PIA cargo office and handed over the receipt for our goods. Just then, there was another frantic call.

"Are you there yet?"

There was barely time to reply when the door clicked and he entered in person.

I turned around and bit my lip. He was young, perhaps thirty, and hardly the obnoxious personality I had resolved to overpower by the force of righteous feminine will. He did not look very important, even a little bedraggled after a sprint in the rain.

"Assalam-u-alaikum".

We returned the greeting and returned to the counter.

"You must do their work properly," he volunteered, with slightly less confidence.

The bespectacled gentleman handling our papers pursed his lips in a wry, dry way.

"Passport?"

"Passport," echoed our eager aide, while I rummaged about. By this time I felt nearly bad enough to want to help him assume some

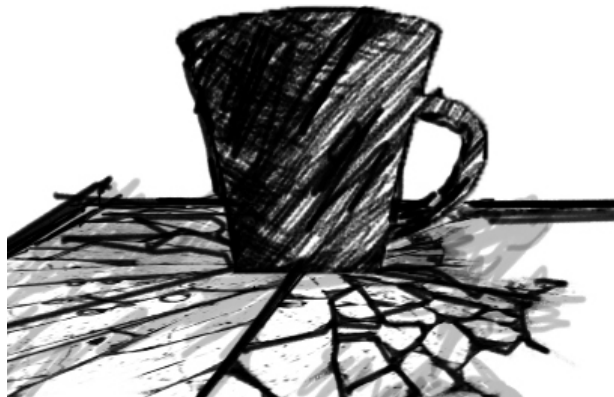
dignified control over the situation. However, there was little to be done. There was no way the process could have been expedited, even if we had let ourselves be taken over by the anxious airport official who sought a lucrative opportunity in a lady's telephone inquiry. Our would-be friend must have sensed this; when I turned around, he was hovering no more.

This small, bland victory was soon eclipsed by the realization that we had picked up a never-ending trail of red tape. I found myself drawing my dupatta a little closer as we crossed the verandah to the cargo warehouse. A great many men were sitting on the benches, leaning against the walls, sipping tea or talking among themselves. It was raining, but somehow I suspected that the picture of the verandah was just so even when summer was at its most witheringly dry. A great many pairs of curious eyes followed us without inhibition, though few must have meant ill.

"Go help them out, Babaji," instructed a ginger-haired smoker, who had been mapping our progress from the first office. One elderly member of the male mass disattached himself from the Great Many and attached himself to our little group. Babaji had only been waiting to oblige.

So it was that we found ourselves swallowed by a powerful sub-culture stemming not only from male protectiveness, but from that deeply entrenched South Asian practice of delegation. We could not fight the expectations aroused by our gender and appearance.

The process of cargo retrieval is straightforward but tedious, involving much running around to get first one then another document



stamped. Babaji and his friends may have had formal job descriptions, but they were not required. With luck and an appearance of amiable efficiency, they could earn a living from being self-appointed liaison officers between clients and the warehouse staff. It takes a few hundred rupees to “locate” one’s particular boxes in the go-down, a few more to get the papers past a random sticky stage, and a final few to thank Babaji for his stamina.

As I sat on a bench in the warehouse in sullen surrender, I wondered how much I actually begrudged the loss of the hundred rupee notes. I was irked, it was true, by the principle that it was somebody’s job to find my boxes and the relevant He was not performing it. I secretly thought about how I could have waited in the car and let the unfortunate airport official assume some importance, perhaps for a few hundred more. Then I looked at the ring of chairs under the fan turning ever so slowly under the high warehouse ceiling. There were young men, grey men, strong men, waiting for a chance to leap to their feet. I wondered how many alternate ways there were of providing that chance.

The sound of an airplane landing in the background brought the vivid memory of yesterday’s drawing-room conversation. When family and friends went to identify the victims of the Air-Blue plane crash, they were told that no jewelry or valuable electrical equipment was retrieved from the wreck. It was said that women who might have been wearing rings or bracelets were found with hands amputated. Such is the desperation of making ends meet.

Babaji and his comrades were not among the dishonest men of the world, nor yet the desperate. They were simply the products of a generation bred on chai-pani. The metaphorical beverages come in all forms, consumed by different genres of people. There is the kind bought by policemen, vending freedom from jail and traffic tickets; bureaucrats, holding on to applications needing approval; politicians, sipping cups of the strongest brew. Just as nepotism is now called networking, the euphemism for bribery is heartbreakingly mundane.

Chai, pani. Tea, water. Both are almost equally essential for survival in Pakistani life. They have long seeped into the fabric of every institution, so no one remembers the original colours. Who is to say that with a bit of will-power we shouldn’t need tea, and that water is a right that should be free for all?

Not businessmen, going about their contracts and tenders. Not activists, campaigning against injustice while blocking the best jobs for the undeserving. Not me sitting on my bench, watching an old man do my running around. I had no solution for the tea-drinking men whose taxable income could not pay the rent.

It was then that I began to see the holes in the do-it-yourself philosophy. It was not always going to work. Not unless hundreds of manicured hands were ready to don dupattas and join the fray in an acceptable way, or thousands of work-worn hands were given the tools to build a respectable life. There were going to be many mountains of red tape to scale, the price of tea rising with the altitude.

“Well, *choti*,” smiled my driver as I got back to the car. “Welcome home.”

SENTINEL

By Rae

Mama, Mama
Why am I dressed in black,
Am I dead?

No, son, no
Grandpa's dead.
He was fighting the Russians
But they got him instead.
He was a tall, strong man
He never let us down.
So let's go and put him
in the cold, cold ground.

Mama, Mama
Why am I dressed in black,
Am I dead?

No, child, no
Uncle is dead.
He was fighting Indians
But they got him instead.
He was a good, strong man
He never let us down.
So now, let's go and put him
in the cold, cold ground.

Mommy, Mommy
Why am I dressed in black,
Am I dead?

No, sweet, no
Daddy's dead.
He was fighting the terrorists
But they got him instead.
He was a brave, strong man
He never let us down.
So let's go put him
in the cold, cold ground.

Mother, Mother
Why am I dressed in black,



Babar Moghal 2006 - Oil on canvas

Am I dead?

No, dear, no
Brother is dead.
He was fighting insurgents
But they got him instead.
He was a kind, young man,
He never let us down.
So let's go and put him
in the cold, cold ground.

Mother, Mother
Why am I dressed in black
Am I dead?

No, son, no.
Not yet.

Rae is currently moored in the restless waters of Islamabad. Although her hailing port is Pakistan her heart follows the shifting winds, meaning that she is never anchored anywhere for too long. Feeling that a sailor's life must encompass both, Rae learns science by day and dedicates her nights to the arts.

12 CHILD ABUSE

By Areej Siddiqui

Out of the spotlight, child abuse is an important forgotten detail of Pakistan.

It is too easy to confine physical abuse to the lust for violence, sexual abuse to sexual frustration, emotional abuse to simple pig-headedness, but at the root of all these is raw power. Repeated studies and analyses of abusers show that abusers act out of a need for power. In cases of child sexual abuse, the situation is further complicated by concepts of “honour” and the mobility allowed each child.

Though child labour isn’t considered much of an issue in third world countries, it frequently sets the stage for violent abuse. The Pirwadhai bus station in Rawalpindi is notorious for child prostitution;

young boys are employed to “serve” clients more than just

Young girls have to contend with abusers in more of a domestic setting, either working as the help or simply living at home. Child marriages too fall under child abuse but go widely unreported.

Local NGOs have taken to recording cases presented in local media but the data collected, is highly unrepresentative of the actual number. Crimes against children, unless resulting in death, seem well-tolerated even by the judiciary. Child abuse in Pakistan is actively and passively supported by social conventions and the law enforcement system.

The personhood of children has been acknowledged by the UN Convention on the Rights

of the Child; however, the de facto acceptance of this leaves much to be desired. Child abuse cannot be eradicated unless individuals recognise the power politics operating within their own relationships. If we are to treat children with the slightest amount of decency, we must first recognise children as persons with legitimate concerns and rights. Systemic the problem of child abuse is, the battle to fight is a personal one.

RE~CASTING THE MEDIA

By Madeeha Ansari

Researched by Sana Saleem

Sensationalism reaches outstanding levels

“If Natha commits suicide, the election will flip.”

Such is the power of journalism projected by “Peepli Live”, Aamir Khan’s satirical portrayal of the media in India. The sensation produced by a single “human interest” story can open the gates for a sea of political rhetoric and manoeuvring; a nation-wide wave of protests and candle-lit vigils; and, in the process, the turning of real human tragedy into a farce.

If the film was meant to draw an exaggerated sketch, it was uncannily close to a snapshot of the Pakistani reality. After the loosening of the media laws in 1999, the sector has undergone a rapid revolution. No longer does the state-owned PTV monopolise the provision of entertainment and news; over a hundred young private competitors are beginning to flex their fingers and discover their outreach. The print media, too, is adapting to the challenges of the time, with leading newspapers going online, discovering multimedia and creating space for citizen journalism. In this new atmosphere, the value of shock – or petty sensationalism – is a complicated variable for the modern ethical journalist who also wants to survive.

While vying for public attention and sponsorship, the media is in constant danger of getting carried away. I remember interning at a reputable news channel a few years ago, when a rival channel aired a story of human negligence. An elderly lady who lived with her son had developed painful bedsores, without her family realising it. Suddenly, there was a mad scramble to get more and more trivial information about her son, her daughters, her history and life story. I remember blushing and thinking, even then, about how my fast-talking colleague should just let it go after a point. Go to a public hospital, I thought. Talk

to some of the bed-ridden patients there and perhaps there would be even more to report.

In the attempt to catch the eye of those who habitually flick through channels, broadcast journalism has also come to rely on different kinds of gimmickry. Among these is the animated simulation. When people switched on their televisions after the Air Blue plane crash, the first thing they saw was a 3D Pixar-inspired image of a plane colliding with a hill and disappearing in a cloud of smoke on the side of the screen. At the time, the animation was distracting in its insensitivity. Such devices trivialise – even aggravate – the suffering of those directly touched by tragedy.

Other embodiments of commercialism serve to detract from the real story, which is often



Babar Moghal 2007 - Oil on canvas

bizarre enough to render gimmickry superfluous. If the Prime Minister of the country was taken in by a fake medical relief camp, then the media should be lauded for holding a mirror to his (surprised) face. Not only did the incident highlight the lack of transparency in official relief efforts, it was a clear illustration of the divorce of the political elite from the reality of the country. The picture was powerful and ridiculous, all at once. Scenes from the Bollywood comedy “Munna Bhai” did not need to be played in the adjacent screen, as they were by channels like Geo. It is different to have slapstick humour on “Hum Sab Umeed Se Hain”; during the national news-hour, it is enough just to present the facts and trust the audience to form its conclusions.

The same can be said about the print media, which has been growing ever bolder. There needs to be a much clearer demarcation between op-ed pieces and regular news stories. Veteran writers like Ansar Abbas, having been threatened by the establishment in the past, have adopted a singularly dramatic style of writing. The journalist’s job is more difficult than it seems, requiring a removal of the self from the black and white newsprint. In a news piece, objectivity of tone and language are of the essence.

The current trends in the press might be reflecting a skewed perception of public demand. It is true that we have become a nation that is hungry for news “as it happens”; we live in turbulent times, when there is much for us to know on a daily basis. However, the demand is for truth, whether it is in coverage of the government, the incessant violence, or the situation of flood victims in different districts. It is not for the sensationalist trappings of “exclusive” coverage, the pursuit of which can lead to a serious lack of responsibility when reporters and their vehicles swarm to the same spot.

One of the most disturbing instances of reckless distortion to date occurred during coverage of the Ashura bombing in Karachi, December 2009. Immediately after the blast, television channels flashed images of the head of a person alleged to be the suicide bomber.

Later, it was discovered that the recovered skull actually belonged to a boy scout leading the procession. No public apology was made for the mistake by the forces that seek to increase accountability in the country. It was an important omission, even if the acknowledgment could have brought but little comfort to the aggrieved family who had lost a son and seen him defamed in the national press.

Perhaps that is an isolated, particularly terrible incident. It is true that broadcast and print media do represent a unique industry that has the potential to create real positive change, by creating awareness. In Pakistan, it has come to play a pivotal role in bringing a sense of empowerment to the masses and highlighting the role of civil society. In the recent past, it has had a definite hand in facilitating a regime shift, reinstating a chief justice and instilling a sense of national pride in an apathetic generation. Television has also risen to the occasion in difficult times, running campaigns against extremism and airing fund-raising telethons lasting entire days in the wake of natural disasters. The problem is discovering how to effectively present information without resorting to melodrama.

More than the headiness of newfound freedom, I blame the dismal science of economics for any misguided trends. Even in the foreign press, issues of sensationalism arise when there is competition in the free market for support from advertisers. That is where the gimmickry stems from, as well as the exploitation of shock value. The first step towards constructing a code of media ethics would be to switch from the libertarian model relying on corporate sponsorship, to reliance on financial support from the public audience itself. If the media were to turn to the social responsibility model followed by the likes of BBC News, its survival would depend on the news-hungry audience. Then, there could be an automatic shift from tabloid entertainment mode to a commitment to providing simple, important truth.

Of course, that would be the objective academic analysis, assuming an idyllic transition.



Babar Moghal 2007 - Gouache on paper

Though reality is never so smooth, the change is not impossible. If there is a sense of hope remaining in this battered country, the media has much to do with it. It would not do for the pens of commentators to flow in fluid criticism without accepting that there is so much potential and room for growth. While realising its power to shape the mindset and collective memory of a nation, the media is not yet set in its mould. It has not yet passed the exciting stage where its role can be rewritten to make it stronger, cleaner, more nuanced. There is still time to grow, to mature and to learn, and to steer around the sensationalist stereotypes of “Peepli Live”.



Babar Mughal 2007 - all on canvas

SATRE, AND HERBERT

By Ibraheem Shakeel

The construction was finally complete.

It had taken me almost thirteen years to finish, but now it was done. I took a step back and tilted my head upwards to marvel at its height.

Now they'll never know, I thought to myself happily. The grey lines of dried cement between each layer of red bricks were a cliché that barked 'philistine!' at me, but I did not care. It didn't matter as long as the structure served its purpose.

He stood at the top, peeping through the last remaining gap waiting to be filled by a brick in his hands. "This is it," my faithful friend

shouted, "There is no turning back after this."

I smiled as I imagined my coliseum of solitude, my perfect circle, complete. I looked at him, calmly thinking of how I was going to shove him off the top and hear his back crackle on the ground from where I stood.

It'll be magnificent! To kill the last remaining obstinate tie with my horrors of the world— to forever cut off the comrade who would rip the world apart on a single word from me. I couldn't wait.

Not yet, not until it's complete, I told myself.

"Yes, quickly before the layer dries," I shouted back with a straight face, holding back the urge to grin manically.

"You know, it's completely normal. Not even a big deal, if you ask me," he mumbled as he lowered the burning red into its place. I could barely make it out: "Shit happens. But since you're a pal and everything..."

He slid the brick in and slapped it twice with his rusted spade, the sun's red beam finally cut off. I was left alone in the dark, swallowed by its nothingness.

I fell to my knees, and felt my face crack into its manic true self: this was the happiest moment of my life.

I heard my friend turn around and hop off the wall, calmly. I didn't see his expression, but I was glad he'd jumped to safety. I don't think I could've killed him.

"You know," he said from the other side, "I finally got to read that book you lent me, the one you couldn't read." I moved away, preparing to dismiss him before he spoke again.

"The ending was fantastic," he said, "It was all about you, too. I memorized it, it went:

'I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me, and through me. And when it has gone, I will turn to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.'

Where the fear has gone there will be nothing, only I will remain, I repeated to myself. And then a laugh came over me, a crazy manic laugh that not even I knew was within me. In that dark crypt, waving my hands wildly and dancing in circles, I laughed wildly until grief took over me.

And then I crumbled to my knees and sobbed, unable to stop.

Behind the wall, my friend sighed. "I'll go get the steel mallet," he said as his steps took him away from the wall.

Ibraheem Shakeel lives in Islamabad, Pakistan, is a computer systems engineer by profession, and likes to write from time to time. He is currently employed, and spends most of his earnings on PS3 games, ciggarettes and caffeine. Ibraheem also happens to be a music lover, often misquoting lyrics from time to time.

ADAM

By T. J. Garcia

I, first feeling this sunken heat, first
scraping this grain desert, first
sitting under verdant walls, I

first touching these rooted crags, first
tripping in the mountain's gloam, first
reaching this brackish fountain, I

first holding the ocean, first
drinking its salt poison, first
sinking to my knees, I

first trying to understand, I

first trying to speak

I



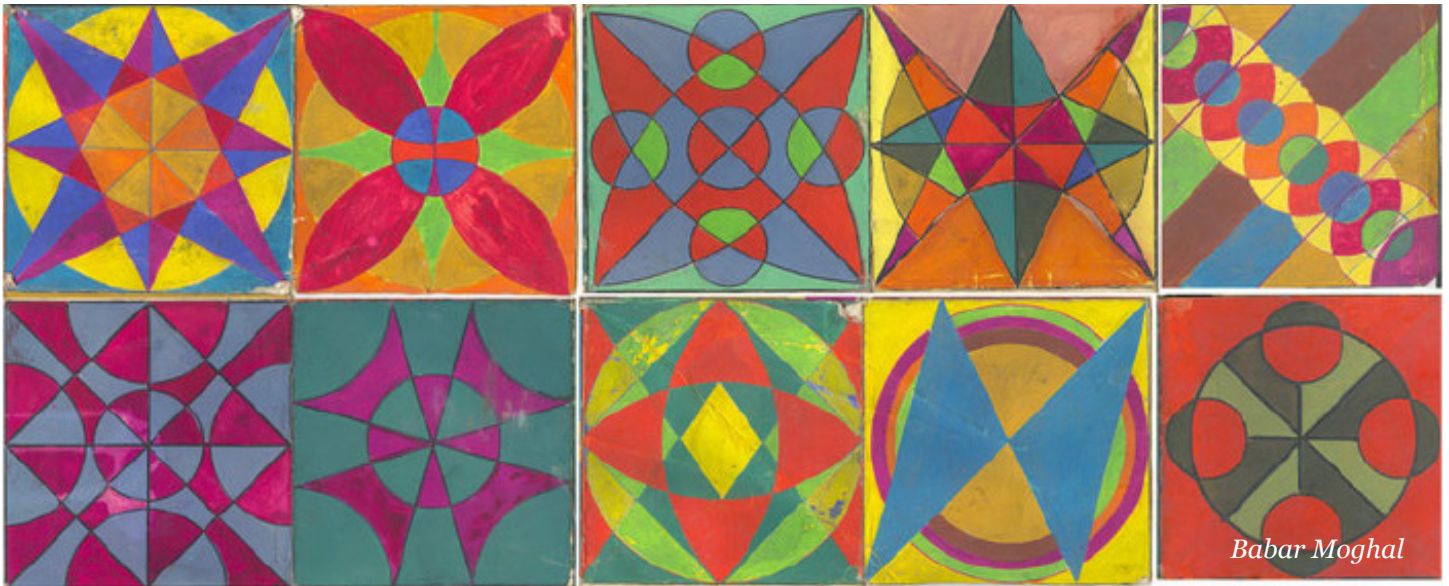
Babar Moghal 2010 - Oil on board

T.J. Garcia is in a constant state of discovery when it comes to writing, living somewhere between Orange County, California, and the internet. He is a full time university student, and in his free time works as a Gallery Moderator for deviantART.com.

THE AESTHETICS OF BELIEF

By Maria Amir

If people are smart, religion and art can co-exist.



“It is the metaphysically given that must be accepted: it cannot be changed. It is the man-made that must never be accepted uncritically: it must be judged, then accepted or rejected and changed when necessary.”—Ayn Rand

Over the years I have encountered many a drawing room discussion bemoaning the fact that Islam is allegedly ‘anti-art’. The allegation generally stems from ignorance, as do most allegations, but the intonation persists. Many reformist Muslims have found it particularly challenging to reconcile their religion with their expression of it, especially when said expression seeks an artistic outlet.

The essential dilemma here lies in defining what, if anything, constitutes art. It is only in the past two centuries that the superlative East has become accustomed to taking all of its cues from the ‘Western World’, and sadly this trend has also infringed upon most definitions of self-expression. The irony this development poses is bitter at best.

Defining art is a notoriously difficult enterprise as it is, but for Muslims it also involves narrowing down what Islam is willing to acknowledge in the realm of aesthetics. The presumption separating religion and art on

grounds that the former operates along set rules and patterns and the latter encapsulates the entire range of human expression, is an extremely simplistic view of both ‘art’ and ‘religion’. Traditionally, it may be said that the original patron of art in all societies has been religion, from the Catholic Church’s commissioning Michelangelo’s paintings in the 1500’s to Indian classical dance and raagas inspired by tales in the Ramaayan and Upanishads.

What most of us tend to overlook in our consideration of art and religion, is the fact that both overwhelmingly center on ‘expression’. The former navigates emotion and the latter devotion; neither of which can be completely separated from the other and in the case of Islam each informs the other. Many continue to posit the idea that reconciling the domain of aesthetics with religion is impossible, as aesthetics pertains to beauty for its own sake, whereas religion revolves around the glorification of God. Both assertions are fundamental and true, however one needs to take into account the fact that in the case of religion the concept of beauty is seldom, if ever, separated from anything. ‘Beauty’ is perceived to denote anything that complements or corresponds with God and his creation and thereby



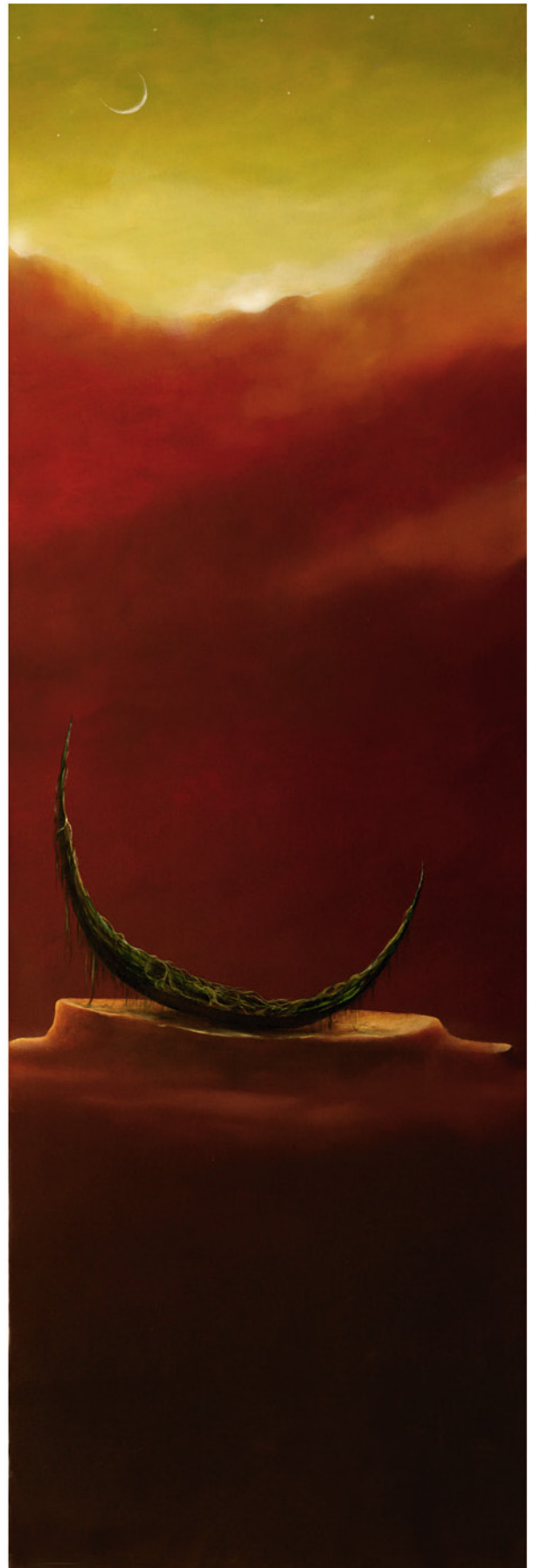
Babar Moghal 2005 - Oil on canvas

20 a believer's art is often informed and directed by his or her belief.

This is not to say that conflict does not arise when this is not the case. In instances where a person's religious faith conflicts with their definition of 'freedom', there is a potent divide between religion and art, as inherent oppositions are pit against each other. In several sufi traditions, the believer 'seeks' freedom within their belief in God whereas in secular traditions freedom is invariably located outside of this domain. Both tangents have little to do with dogma or affiliation and everything to do with perception. One's art is essentially categorized by how one perceives it - as an expression of emotion or of faith - both of which can be interchangeable.

This conflict was first publicly alluded to when German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten formally developed the concept of 'aesthetics' in the 18th century. Baumgarten coined the term, deriving it from the Greek *aisthanesthai* (to perceive) and also clarified that aesthetics meant perception by means of the senses. The term was subsequently applied to the philosophical study of all the arts and manifestations of natural beauty, and came to be mainly associated with artistic creativity. In Islamic culture the term "aesthetics" never existed, nor any other term that might imply its meaning or significance. The contemporary Arabic term *jamaliyyah*, now synonymous with aesthetics is borrowed from the West and is defined as the 'science of beauty' or *ilm al-jamal*. This definition firmly grounds 'beauty' as a perceivable and definable component of the human condition: something that can be analysed and expressed not in the whole (reserved exclusively for divine creation), but in the sum of its parts (elements that combine to form harmony). This is perhaps why the most popular modes of Islamic art include calligraphy, architecture and poetry, all of which rely primarily on scale, proportion and depth that can be deconstructed ad infinitum. The Islamic tradition tends to circumvent the more subjective arts, which rely primarily on intuition and self-perpetuated emotion such as dance and music.

The idea of a center or axis is the key to decoding most Islamic art, according to Islamic scholar al Gharni, who draws the evocative corollary of the whirling Mevlevi dervishes; the pilgrim's tawaf around the Kabah and Islamic architecture and calligraphy's predominant usage of the circle in its imagery. "I will not



Babar Moghal 2006 - Oil on canvas

limit art to the pithy realm of 'haraam' and 'halaal' for that brings in too much literature and jurisprudence that we can never know definitively because much is left to interpretation," he says. "What is for certain is the believer's intention, if the artist's heart, mind and will are centered towards God than his art will inevitably be Islamic."

In Islam, neither the Quran nor the Prophetic tradition (sunnah) refers to art specifically. There were no treatises written expressly on Islamic aesthetics nor were express rules laid down for what constituted Islamic art and what didn't. The religion binds art and faith together; and beauty is perceived to involve all things that please God. Within the framework of tradition, sufficient liberty is left for the artist to express him or herself but the exclusion clause remains, *Islamic art must be in accordance with Islam*.

Liberal scholars overwhelmingly avoid limiting art to a particular form of expression such as dance or music, as orthodox scholars such as al-Mawdudi categorically condemn most forms of such expression. What remains consistent however, is the call for God's will to be taken into consideration in all forms of self-expression. Given that Muslims are ordered to consider God's commandments in all aspects of their everyday life, striking a balance in artistic expression was not always considered the trying negotiation it is today.

One can, in large part, credit the recent conflict to globalization and capitalism. Both movements have integrated the world and its denizens in a manner where most individuals are shifting towards integration, not only of ideas but also of lifestyles. It is foreign dance and singing competitions that make young Muslims today seek to push the bar of what could (if possible), constitute 'Islamic dance' and 'Islamic music'. Their plight is extremely complex as it seeks to challenge the boundaries of a religion that has long been interpreted by clerics and scholars who tend to enjoy upholding as many boundaries as they possibly can.

And yet, this is not the definitive nature of the religion itself. As mentioned earlier, Is-

lamic theology has very little to say on specific forms of art and almost all interpretations of religious texts in this regard tend to revolve around interpretation via *ijma* and *qi-yas*. These interpretations range widely from the Salafi, Wahabi and Deobandi to the Sufi and Bareilvi schools of thought, with a veritable rainbow of individual recommendations in between.

Amid such a dilemma, one often ends up qualifying the art in question. The outward form, or *dhahir*, which underlines the quantitative and physical aspect that is obvious and readily intelligible is separated from the essential, qualitative aspect that is kept hidden, or inward, *batin*. The art of Islam is essentially a contemplative one, where the work of man will never equal the art of God but seeks only to emulate the shaping of human ambience. It is connected with the concept of *ihsan* as set forth in the Hadith of Gabriel narrated by Umar ibn al-Khattab, whereby the religion rests on three fundamental principles: Islam (submission to the Divine Will), Iman (faith), and Ihsan (spiritual virtue). Perhaps the most useful rules of thumb for comprehending Islamic art were put forth by the great jurist, theologian and sufi thinker al-Ghazali.

Ghazali writes of three types of beauty: The first is external physical beauty (*dhahir*) that he regards as the most debased "... as to [mans] beauty, he is little more than nauseous matter covered with a fair skin. Without frequent washing he becomes utterly repulsive and disgraceful." (Chapter I of *Kimia al-Saadah* (The Alchemy of Happiness)).

The second type involves moral beauty (*batin*): "The former kind of man [a man who is only acquainted with sensuous delights], will say that beauty resides in red-and-white complexions, well-proportioned limbs, and so forth, but he will be blind to moral beauty, such as men refer to when they speak of such and such a man as possessing a beautiful character. Such love is directed not towards any outward form, but towards the inner character. Even when we wish to excite love in a child towards anyone, we do not describe their outward beauty or form, etc... but their

22 inner excellences.”

The final variety is the spiritual; which he regards as the most sublime—“The heart of man has been so constituted by the Almighty that, like a flint, it contains a hidden fire which is evoked by music and harmony, and renders man beside himself with ecstasy. These harmonies are echoes of that higher world of beauty which we call the world of spirits; they remind man of his relationship to that world, and produce in him an emotion so deep and strange that he himself is powerless to explain it.”

Ultimately the supposed conflict between religion and art rests entirely on the individuals’ perceptions of both. Ayn Rand, in what is perhaps one of the most comprehensive modern treatises on the nature of Art ‘The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature’ stated “contradictions do not exist. Whenever you think you are facing a contradiction, check your premises. You will find that one of them is wrong.” This operative requirement can well be seen as a fundamental cornerstone in decoding the seemingly impossible choice of reconciling creative expression with religious devotion.

The individual that is religious will instinctively direct his or her art in the vein of verifying and/or expressing his or her faith. The individual that is not religious will denote his or her art from outside this scope and will no doubt find some other prism from which to view it for Rand prefaced her arguments with “Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments.”

While many would consider taking a ‘to each their own’ approach on the veritable quicksand of loopholes that frames the discourse surrounding art in Islam as a cop out, the fact remains that there simply isn’t enough evidence to corroborate Islamic views on modern art. Islamic art has traditionally limited itself to matters that concern Islam and operates from within the religious framework. Modern and postmodern artistic endeavors seldom bother to take traditional aesthetic models into account. The debate comes back to the

individual artist’s approach towards reformation. There are those artists who wish to explore and push the boundaries of their faith and art and those that consider this a violation.

At the end of the day, the aesthetic of belief is entirely dependent on the individual’s personal interpretation of their religion. Ironically, the same tends to be true for the aesthetic of creativity.



Babar Moghal 2003 - pencil on paper



Babar Moghal 2010 - Pencil on paper

THE DRIVE

By Omri J. Luzon

Sitting here in this pointless office, I wander in my mind to different places, different times, different worlds. Somehow it feels like the world is trying to erase my ambition, creativity and ability to touch other people. I don't know what to do with myself anymore, it is frustrating to not think that you are a machine, typing and pressing gray buttons to the rhythm of the ticking clock.

Some low whispered empty conversations, annoying mechanical phone rings, the night is falling down so fast you can't even feel it coming. The windows are so dark you cannot see the real difference between day and night, it's all the same here, all the same.

A girl approaches me, bends a little on my desk, smiling. She says she's from Human

Resources, wants to interview me about the workers conditions. I nod as I log off my user and detach of the keyboard. She leads me into a small room, round table, two chairs and a little laptop sitting quietly, humming to itself.

She asks me about my work, my tasks, responsibilities and ambitions. I reply, noticing her hand slowly crawling towards mine. The paycheck, the bonuses, her fingers are on mine, the breaks, the inter relationships, her lips against my neck, the attitude of the management, the annual reports, her tongue is in my ear, the neon lighting, the softness of my hands.

She takes her shirt off, take my pants off; I close my eyes and listen to the clock ticking, just as if I'm typing on my keyboard. There's no going back now, I know, from here on it's a one way street, a path I never wanted to explore. She is on me now, kissing me passionately, praying in my ear, saying my name, moan.

I sit at my car, hands on the wheel. The engine is turned on, murmuring, complaining on the weather. I shouldn't go home...I really shouldn't go home. Driving down through rain and smoke, a cigarette tucked between my fingers, my eyes grow tired. It's not the time, I tell myself as her lips kiss mine, it's not the time for dreaming. The traffic light turns green, I pump the gas, the cars are moving. Eyelids grow heavy, her fingers on my chest, left palm against the back of my neck. The traffic light turns green, I pump the gas, the cars are moving. It's time to go. My eyes are asleep, the car is off the road, and I wonder what day it is.

Omri J. Luzon is a 28 year old writer from the too-hot Israel. Omri started as an editor for the radical music magazine First Born; his pieces were published through magazines like New State Magazine, Spark Bright, Distinct Literature, and others. Currently he works on a Masters degree in Literature and promoting Mindless Echoes—his international rock band.

HONEST MAN THIS GUN AIN'T LOADED

By Iskra Valentine

Words are failing to capture the rapture surrounding the unsolved mystery of the man who
 walked through a peaceful winter night only to steal from me
 and while i sit here trying to make sense of the crazy little pieces finally coming together to
 shape one more clichéd fairytale i realise we were never part of the equation
 Let them have their romance, their flowers, their lover's words
 give them all the matching his and hers
 i merely want to be that last drink before bed
 i want to be that hushed honey sweet whisper hanging on your lips
 the last ember glowing in the dark
 i want to sleep in the curve of your smoky midnight smile

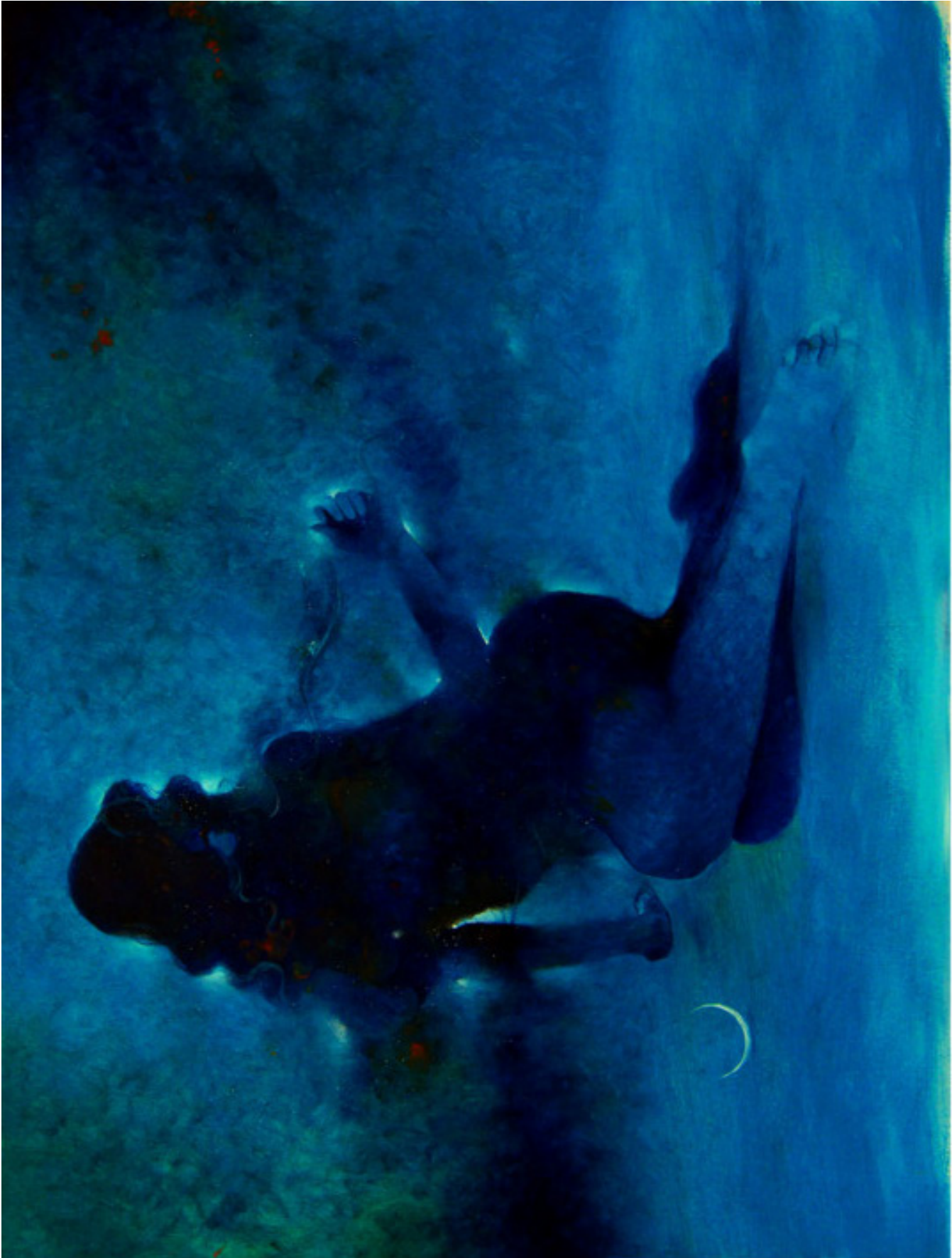
And if there is anything i want you to know
 it is that in me you'll always have a home
 and that i will be a mirror, cold and exact
 what you show me, i will show back
 The difference between her and i
 is that i will never let you rescue me
 tie me up and watch me fly
 i have wings at the soles of my feet and in my pinions i hide razorblades

i warn you, i will destroy you
 only to watch you give birth to yourself
 I promise you nothing and i will deliver
 and we will revel in this sick sad mess
 and i will trade romance novels for Nietzsche
 and i will happily sleep alone
 and i will steal back my heart when that man is sleeping
 I will take his too if it's worth keeping
 and i will show you his face and you will see yourself
 and i will keep our hearts safely out of our reach
 while we slowly undress and caress to the humdrum of the lubdublubdublubdubstep.

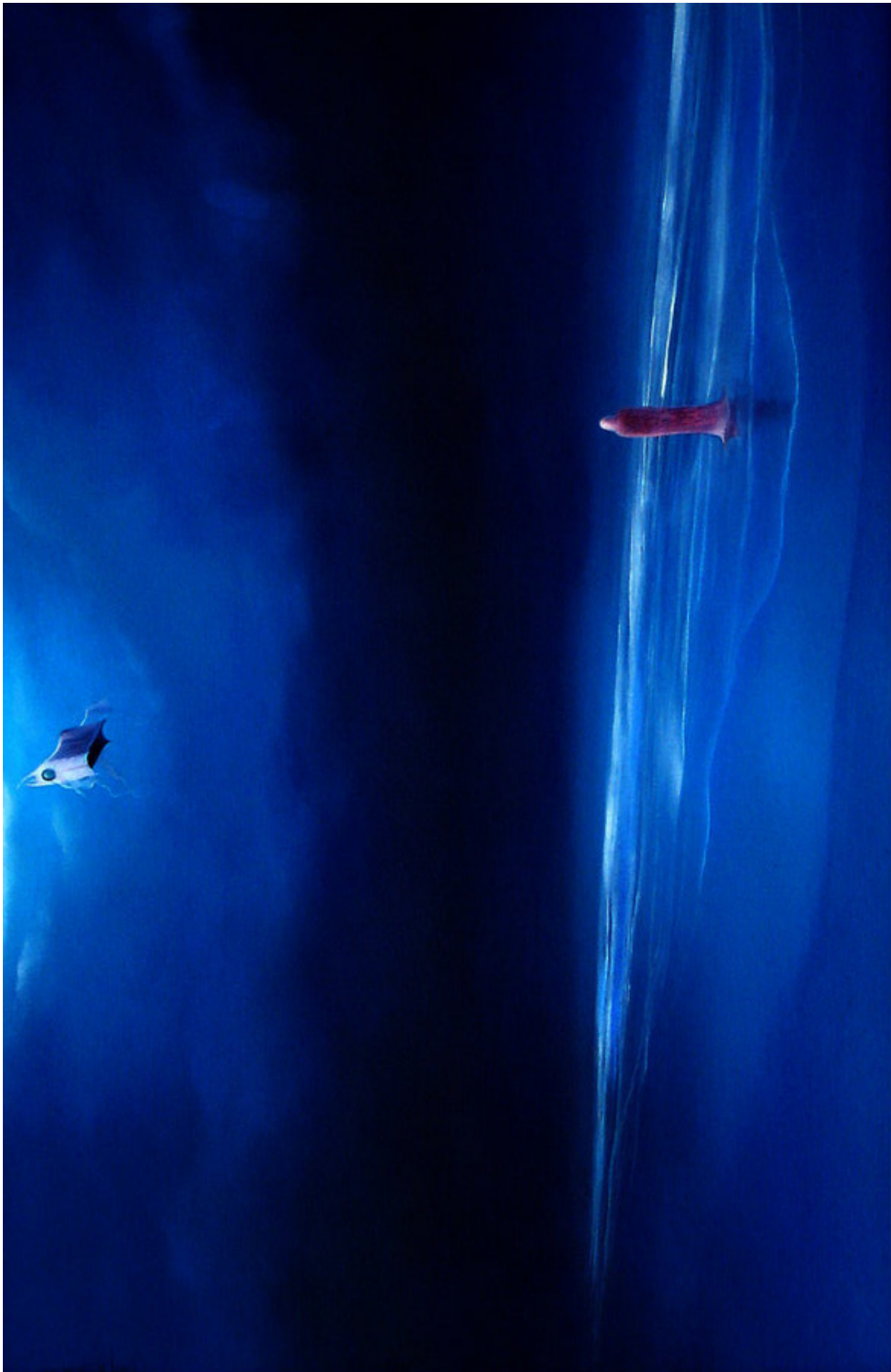
Honestly, i'm the only honest thing in your life.

—Iskra Valentine

Iskra Valentine is an activist, feminist, burlesque artist and writer from Australia. When she is not tackling GBLTI issues in writing, she is out protesting them in the streets or on stage. Iskra finds her inspiration on quiet nights, reading beat poetry in the bath listening to Nick Cave with a drink in one hand and cigarette in another.



Babar Moghal 2010 - Oil on board



Babar Moghal 2005 - Oil on canvas

FORGET~ME~NOT

By Maryam Piracha

"You will learn to forget me," he had said.

Said it like we were strangers whispering conversations in cloak closets, through racks of sleeves; polyester, wool, suede. This is what we've turned into. Ironed out figments of our imagination. But I'm not going to let him do this to me, to us. You have to fight for what you believe in, right? Isn't that what we're taught by indulgent parents; to never give up, to always rise above the tide and do what you gotta do? After all, aren't I just listening, adhering to the wishes of my elders?

In better days, the village elders were the definitive source for all wisdom; past, present, future. It was almost sacrilege; no, cross that; it *was* sacrilege to defy them. So really, my holding onto the ghosts of ourselves is just a natural inclination to follow well meaning and all knowing advice. I can justify this till the ends of time which of course

Is exactly what he doesn't want me to do. But isn't love the opposite of logic? Isn't it meant to defy it? Surely, I am allowed my whims, my inanities, my obsessions; we all have *needs* don't we? Aren't I just acting on human impulse?

Life was a lot less complicated when I first saw him or thought I did; when I couldn't believe what I was seeing, processing, believing. Stuff like this wasn't meant to happen to me, wasn't supposed to happen in real life. Once you said goodbye, that was it, it was meant to be final. But our goodbyes have always been persistent, if not consistent.

But everything's different now. *You'll learn to forget me*, because unlearning isn't really in my repertoire and learning is a disability I proudly champion. I can still see him, if I squint really, really hard; he's standing there, in the doorway, hand on his heart, head against the frame staring at me, smiling. How dare he, really? How dare *he* be the one to choose to pronounce this as our final goodbye? What did I do to deserve this...this desertion? Plain and simple. We are army corporals in a far-

way land, fighting a losing battle because our superiors are telling us: this is the right war, this is the right way; sanity awaits through bloodshed. Countless wars have been fought with their followers indoctrinated to this rite of will. How are we different from terrorists?

We are terrorists, terrorizing the lives of the people we love, racing through daffodil fields, cutting them off at the heads with arms stretched out, hands plucking mindlessly. We are peace lovers, flower children, lying spread out, faces to the sky, hands inches apart looking out; up to the glorious future. We are mindless gunmen, machine gunning down reds, pinks and yellows in our lives, leaving them bleeding on the ground, oozing out love, happiness, forgiveness; cowardly assassins, stalking off with grief as our only reward. We are cardiothoracic surgeons, patching up broken leads; thoughts, ideals, visions and stitching them on to the seams of our conscience. We are army corporals again, lying stretched out in empty hospital beds, our daffodil heads clamped on to happy feet, bloodied arms and glorious fingers interlocking.

We have stomped across the world together, atop bridges and through coliseums, seeing them through eyes that only dreamed as children so often do. Our muddied boots leave messy footprints behind us, starting their course from the house of my parents; the house of my youth; the house of better days and happier times. Sitting there, having to listen to them, having to contend with their cautious stares, worrylines and crowfeet beginning to course their way onto their skin, pockmarked and pitied. Where was he then? Why not tell me then, when I was most willing to hear it; *you will learn to forget me*. Yes! Yes, I could have, then. I would have, then.

Why come back into my life? Looking out at me across the mirror, making love to me through bedsheets, standing by my side with every gust of breezy, beachy air? Why torture

28 me needlessly, if only to desert me? Love 'em and leave 'em, right? Why now? Now, that we had found each other again?

You will learn to forget me.

I feel like we are speaking across a chasm, our voices echoing with every backwards step we take. Almost as if we are atop two ships out at sea, a deafening gulf between us, and the plank should it be laid with some foresight between the two ships, crumbling and falling into the sharky waters below.

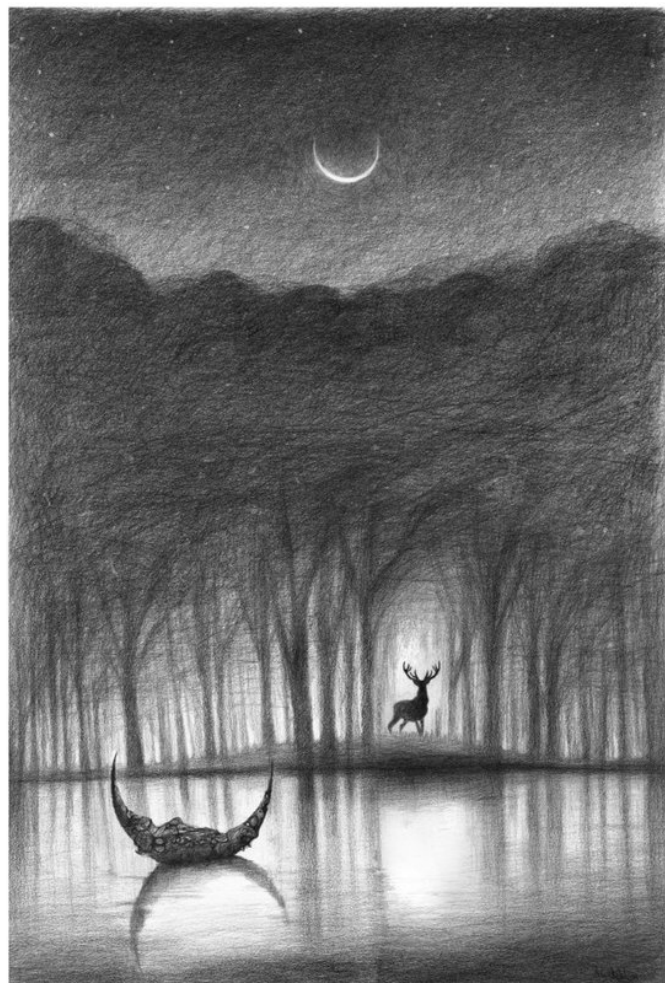
But we have been passengers on parallel ships for a long time. Let me go. You will learn to forget me.

He has been a part of me; I have carried him everywhere, taken him into my dreams. What do you do with a person like that? Do you let them go, drop them to the wayside as they are asking you to? Pretending like they don't exist, to assuage some guilt—some residual guilt you can't quite understand, because you can't quite grasp—it isn't visible, seen only, perceived only by them.

Is that meant to be fair? Seen as some misplaced act of justice especially now, now, that they have walked so far away into a land where you cannot possibly follow.

Death.

Is that supposed to mean anything to me?



Babar Moghal 2009 - Pencil on paper

Maryam Piracha is the Editor-in-Chief of The Missing Slate, previously serving as the 6 year EiC of PaperCuts, an online literary journal and is currently an MA in Creative Writing grad student at Lancaster University, UK. Her work has been published in Chowk, PaperCuts and The News and was shortlisted in the Oxford University Press's short story competition in 2007.

CAFÉ BOL

By Maria Amir

Talk about a revolutionary idea, but is Pakistan ready for a revolution?

Many have said that all it really takes to change the world is an original idea and enough people believing in it. This certainly holds true of Café Bol, a tiny establishment inspired by Faiz Sahab's classic poem by the same name. The joint venture by philosophy enthusiast / political science major Qalandar Memon and LUMS law professor Asad Farooq, looks to provide an 'independent thinking space' for young and old alike.

I recall being intrigued by the café several months ago when I encountered the Café Bol Facebook page, showcasing a weekly 'Thus Spake Nietzsche' night. As I made my way to the tiny room in Main Market adjacent to a narrow street surrounded by tea shops, mechanics and tailors, I couldn't help but wonder why anyone would open a café for young Lahoris where few would bother making the trip. Until I realized that the entire point of Café Bol was to weed out a 'genuinely motivated' audience from the sloganeers.

The café comprises of a small, rectangular room with no furniture, plenty of rugs and cushions, a 'Bol' poster, a bookshelf and a kaava station (read rickety table, with a portable gas stove). All in all, the menu consists of kaavas from all over Pakistan and beyond. "We have Orange kaava, Irani kaava and Balochi, Sindhi, Peshawari blends," Qalandar tells me, as he opens up an assortment of plastic bags and jars.

"Café Bol is really all about cutting across class structures; we are trying to provide a forum for ideas to be exchanged. Ideas that really don't find a space anywhere else," he tells me and I immediately draw a parallel with Pak Tea House in the 70's, but Qalandar says *Bol* isn't really about demagoguery. "There's all kinds of talk, sure and the crowd tends to drive discussions towards politics and religion because that's the way we are conditioned, but I lean towards philosophy and the arts, or obscure themes that aren't really touched

upon in college classrooms or anywhere else," he adds. "Ideas shouldn't be locked up in domains and boxes, they shouldn't be limited to drawing rooms," he says, adding emphatically, "Not everyone has a drawing room. What about those voices?"

Café Bol poses an intriguing nuance and both its location and premises only substantiate this. This tiny room with an open window overlooking the scintillating view of workers welding something or other as a red poster of Che Guevara hangs from the walls of Good Books right across represents a peculiar, uncomfortable and yet poignant buffer zone. "I never wanted to cover up the walls, I like the fact that we can see out and everyone else can see in, it builds in to what we're trying to do here," Qalandar tells me, adding that quite often when the café plays host to a film screening the workers from neighbouring shops come by and request we put on a film for them. "Waris Shah is by far our most popular re-run," he adds with a smile.

I ask him about 'seating arrangements' and logistics and he mentions that the size of the audience fluctuates. "We have a few regulars who show up now and then but it's usually packed when we have a great speaker," he says, adding that speakers like Rafay Aalam can draw a crowd of over 30. "People end up sitting shoulder to shoulder in rows, packed like sardines and for some reason that's part of the charm," he adds. The real draw for the café has most definitely been its speaking events, where topics have ranged from Native American poetry to the environment and from Plato to photography. Magid Shehade who has spoken at the café said "Bol was one of the best experiences, the ambiance makes it one of the best sites to genuinely engage with the audience. The place exists with the goal of opening up space for discussion and intellectual debate, while remaining true to issues of day-to-day concern."

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Sadly, Qalandar tells me that he feels there is little demand for high intellectual discussion. “I suppose our education system has a great deal to do with it,” he says, adding: “People are so geared towards being fed information that it’s rare to find people who genuinely enjoy throwing around new ideas and challenging them.” He tells me that the café originally envisioned an open forum for debates on Sunday, where people could just come in and speak on any subject no-holes-barred. “It was a bust, no one really started a discussion: people here enjoy being lectured and responding to what they’ve been told rather than taking the initiative,” he said, adding the exception: “unless we get the types who have been fed and raised on the media conspiracy theory diet... who tend to go on talking.”

I am apprehensive about employing the term ‘quaint’ to describe this rough, weary and noble place but it fits. Café Bol’s most marked characteristic is its unassuming sim-

plicity. From the photocopied manuscripts of obscure texts on sale to hand-made pottery and stacked issues of Memon’s edited ‘Naked Punch’ gazette. The place practically reeks bohemian independence with its lamps from Multan, the rugs from Bahawalpur and crockery from Sindh.

As I made my way to leave I asked Qalandar if he had any plans to expand, and he said he was barely ‘breaking even’ as it was, “Besides it would...ruin something,” he mused. I asked why there had been no major events at the Café over the summer.

“Well, I bought an AC but I’ve spent most of the summer running after WAPDA to get a connection until it’s up and running. I can’t really expect audiences to show up in this heat,” he tells me. He has a point, Café Bol may thrive on being understated and unassuming but it has a long way to go before its audience is.



SPOTLIGHT: ARTIST BABAR MOGHAL

Starting out our Roving Eye Spotlight series with Babar Moghal, an artist and graphic designer from Karachi, Pakistan couldn't have been a better idea. With a uniqueness and depth hitherto not previously seen in many young artists around the country, Mr Moghal's work is simultaneously beautiful and breath taking. His subjects varied and wide ranging.

Mr Moghal's work has been used throughout the first issue of The Missing Slate, serving as the backdrop to articles, poems and short stories. Below, he answers our questions on just what it is that makes him tick.

Were you always interested in painting?

Yes. I wasn't very bright in school and the only thing that really kept me going were the diagrams required for different subjects. I loved illustrating and experimented and painted with watercolors in my free time. There wasn't such a reliance on computers, Cable TV, or the Internet back then so there was loads of time to kill with paints. After school, I enrolled at the Karachi School of Arts and Graphic Design and truly found my center.

Your work is so uniquely fascinating. Have you ever considered exhibiting outside of Pakistan?

Thank you. Unfortunately, it isn't as dependent on my personal preference as it is on the galleries' choices for display. But thank God for the Internet and virtual galleries; it has helped open up my art to the masses.

Where do you draw your inspiration from and are there/have there been any artists you seek inspiration from?

Music has always been my primary source of inspiration from the very beginning, to be honest. When I first started exhibiting my work, I illustrated psychadelic music and though I still listen to music when I paint, now it's more to turn off the noise inside and around me.

But, there is a long list of artists I sought and

continue to seek inspiration from. First and foremost is the late Zahin Ahmed, who was a teacher in KSA and a master watercolorist, whose work I used to imitate. But I've always loved theatrics and mystery and old masters like Arnold Boecklin, Caspar David Friedrich and Magritte.



Babar Moghal 2009 - Gouache on paper

PAKISTAN YOUTH ALLIANCE ~ A REVIEW

By Wajiha Hyder

Saving the country, one natural disaster at a time.

To help and serve one's country and that too without the expectation of any possible reward is an enormous mission to take on, but the Pakistan Youth Alliance has managed to achieve exactly that in a way that's nothing short of being highly commendable. Since its inception, this brilliant group of twenty some-things led by Syed Ali Abbas Zaidi, has managed to inspire and engage the youth of Pakistan in doing hands-on, practical, substantial



things for their country.

Founded in 2007, PYA's major aim is to steer the youth of Pakistan towards a more positive direction, to wake them up from their apathetic slumber. Their mission involves standing up against the innumerable social evils which have plagued their society practically since its formation; and effectively raising a voice against them.

But this achievement wasn't accomplished overnight; many sacrifices were made to achieve the respect, trust and success that they have today. As Mr. Zaidi put it, "When we started this back in 2007, we faced relentless pressures from people in influential po-

sitions. God knows, our families weren't very supportive since this was a relatively novel concept; it was a turbulent start, but our spirits remained high nonetheless!"

But sooner rather than later, things began to look much brighter. From collecting funds for the rebuilding of schools in Swat to making an active effort for the floods that have desecrated the country's agricultural stability, the Pakistan Youth Alliance has come a long way from its humble beginnings. To date, the group has been responsible for successfully organizing approximately 120 events across the globe.

"Right now we have a wide-ranged, multi-faceted agenda on our hand, which involves the launch of a slum-school and a library in Islamabad, suitable education facilities for young adolescents, flood relief campaigns, a Tour De Pakistan documentary, environmental issues awareness and plastic bags substitution campaigns, etc.," says Mr. Zaidi. "Presently however, our major focus remains on the flood relief campaign which we are managing with immense fervor. But what's been heartening is the massive response by the youth."

Through their efforts, they have effectively reached some 6000 families and at the time of writing, have been able to raise approximately Rs 22 Million in a little under three weeks.

The current floods in Pakistan have shaken the very foundations of the country's already feeble infrastructure and have been a disaster on multiple levels. The UN has already declared the situation to be far larger than the 2004 Asian tsunami, the 2005 Pakistan earthquake and the Haiti earthquake combined.

"Till now we have made some 28 deliveries from KPK to South Punjab and we've seen nothing but hopelessness, despair, cries and complaints. People are fighting with each other to grab eatables for their loved ones; there's complete chaos there. It's undoubtedly the



biggest humanitarian disaster we have ever faced or will, in quite some time,” Mr Zaidi observes.

“I would request everyone to please visit a few affected areas before drawing any conclusions, since it’s only when you interact with the locals that you get the real feel of things. We need to own this disaster. We need to own the chaos. These 20 million Pakistanis are anxiously awaiting our generosity,” he further adds.

Young people who want to actively join hands with the PYA can do so quite conveniently, as explained by Mr Zaidi, “Being a youth-centric volunteer organization mainly, youth from different parts of Pakistan and even those who live abroad, but who want to make a difference can join in on any of the initiatives we have undertaken thus far. All updates are emailed, texted and distributed through our Facebook fanpage and group, where contact numbers and email addresses of all local representatives are listed.”

Readers of TMS will find a helpful platform in PYA, as will other writers, poets and artists, providing them with an outlet to start appropriate discussions about the burning issues affecting their country. All that’s required is for readers of this article to submit their work to the Alliance and their team will take it from there.

As Mr. Zaidi quite aptly puts it, “*Working* when there’s work that needs to be done helps to a great extent. We aim to have a 10 crore strong army of pro-active youth; of workers, of volunteers who’re ready to help solve the internal problems first. We aspire to pick up from where the Quaid left off and eventually build the envisioned Pakistan”.

And isn’t it time that we owned the problems that run rampant in our neighborhoods, society and cities? To see every problem as an opportunity? To look for their solutions? We can’t wait for angels to descend from the heavens to alter the state of affairs in the Land of the Pure.

Because they’re not coming.

An accountant, a self confessed day dreamer and an eternal foodie, Wajiha Hyder has spent most of her life being excessively blithe and “happy-go-lucky”. Since she hasn’t been castigated for it yet, she plans to soldier on! Her first love remains writing, which she does quite fervently on her blog.

REQUIEM FOR THE BEARS

By Hussain Kazmi

Bear versus Hound

Many amongst us grew up reading fantasy tales and fables that cast bears as the wise, strong companions of the protagonist: from timeless classics such as Kipling's Baloo to comparatively recent incarnations in contemporary masterpieces such as Tolkien's Beorn (appearing in *The Hobbit*), and Philip Pullman's Iorek Byrnison (in *His Dark Materials* trilogy). Flipside: soon, these pages and some YouTube or National Geographic footage might become the only places to find bears. With every passing day, the once mighty species edges towards extinction. Of the eight major classes of the bear species (including notable members as the Panda, Polar Bear, and Grizzly Bear), six are now classified as endangered or threatened by extinction. A number of the sub-species have already become extinct during this last century. These include, sadly enough, one of our national bears: the Balochi Bear.

The reasons for this decline in numbers are multifarious. The ancient custom of hunting bears for game ultimately gave way to mercenaries hunting bears for their fur. This, in turn, paved the path for the bear baiters. Bear baiting is the act of pitting a bear – with its claws removed and limbs tied to a stall – against a pair of pure-breed dogs or hounds. If the bear can defeat the dogs, it is proclaimed the winner; but even victory comes at a hefty price: the loss of one or more limbs and participation in future baiting events as their “reward”. Is anyone else reminded of the Roman Gladiatorial games?

This sport (if it can be so called) finds its



roots in 16th century England, where thoroughbred mastiffs were used for the purpose. In the 19th century, the English 'exported' it to the Indian subcontinent, where it lingers to date. Besides being outrageously inhumane, it is one of the major causes of falling numbers of bears in the region. The game has outlived its original players; in large areas, the socio economic conditions remain the same, with the colonials being replaced by feudal lords.

In the far off reaches of Sindh and Punjab, bear baiting has become a regular feature in village games, where it is considered synonymous with a display of power. Gypsies from afar converge to these events with captive bears and sell them to local feudal lords, who then proceed to set up a show for intimidating the serfs. Commonly reported atrocities to the animal kingdom, such as dancing monkeys and circus animals, pale in comparison; only Spanish bull fighting is at par with this outrage.

Current legislation includes up to five years imprisonment along with a fine for injuring, maiming, or killing another person's animal worth more than Rs. 50. These laws, besides

being highly vague and not accounting for wanton cruelty, are seldom implemented. An important factor contributing to this is a lack of support of the feudal and tribal lords, who see these events as an effective way of 'keeping the serfs in place'. Cruelty to animals is, however, only one factor to consider while pushing for legislation towards heavy punishments.

The gypsies selling bears have no other means of income and the attendees of these events have come to see them as perfectly normal. Lately, initiative has been taken to discourage these gypsies by finding them alternate employment and by creating a more aware populace that turns to other, less brutal forms of entertainment. Citations of text from the Quran have been employed to communicate the brutality of this sport to the attendees. Another significant step was the establishment of Kund Sanctuary for bears in 2001, which was designed to provide shelter to bears rescued from baiting. Things seemed to be moving in the right direction until very recently, when there was another unforeseen

catastrophe threatening the existence of these bears.

Much has been (rightly) said and written about the recent floods in Pakistan, but the total annihilation of the Kund sanctuary has somewhat passed under the media radar. Home to more than two dozen rescued bears and a number of other exotic, endangered animals, all that remains now is wreckage and carcasses, with ravens cawing overhead. It is heartbreaking that the bears that lived their lives in such abject misery ended it on the same note. The surviving bears are now scattered and new homes need to be found for them.

One viable option is the Deosai National Park, where the Himalayan Brown Bear has already found safe haven. The Deosai plains are home to millions of flowers in the spring and summer season. By careful tweaking of the ecological balance, more bears could easily find sanctuary in that vast expanse. With over 3000 square kilometers in available area, there certainly is no shortage of space.

The support of the tribal lords is something that must be ensured to guarantee that bear baiting is stamped out within the next few years. However, putting an end to bear baiting is just the first step; a proper sanctuary needs to be found for the bears, alternative means of employment for the gypsies and alternative means of entertainment must be found for the masses. The gypsies could be employed as bear keepers in the sanctuaries and in fact could end up being an invaluable human resource. Some government support has been garnered in this context, but much remains to be done to create a bear baiting free society.

Hussain Kazmi helps prevent robots from taking over the world by contributing exasperating solutions in the field of machine learning. Tackling one nemesis at a time, biographies are next on his ever growing to-do list.

FALL ~ 2010

Featured Artist:
Babar Moghal

“Maintaining Creative Integrity” Illustration:
Abigail Larson - www.abigaillarson.com

“Child Abuse” Photography:
Ahsan Masood

<Insert YOUR name here>

Submissions for The Missing Slate’s second issue are open!
Check out <http://www.themissingslate.com> for details on
how to submit. Poetry, fiction, articles, art and photography
submissions are welcome.

Deadline: December 1, 2010!



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