

THE Story OF Myself

AND SOME FRIENDS IN THESE FRAGMENTS OF DAILY LOVES

The Story of Myself and Some Friends in these Fragments of Daily Loves

ABDULLAH QURESHI

"That kid's queer,"
they said.
Without asking
what the word meant
I went home
and under covers
printed
with Walt Disney characters
I spent
my first sleepless night.

- ERNESTO BAÑUELOS ENRÍQUEZ

The history of National College of the Arts (NCA) is replete with groundbreaking practitioners and legendary figures whose artistic legacy endures even today. Since its inception, the Zahoor ul Akhlaq Gallery at the NCA has supported many of these individuals by being an inclusive and experimental site of investigation. Continuing this tradition, we encourage the use of this platform as a means of fostering a new generation of trailblazers.

NCA is proud to present a solo exhibition by Abdullah Qureshi. Known for his spontaneous and gestural practice, Qureshi is interested in the history of painting, in particular abstract expressionism, and the liminal space between abstraction and representation. Simultaneously, the use of personal history, childhood memories, and traumatic pasts, in a non-linear format have emerged as key concerns for him. Consolidating these parallel enquiries, more recently Qureshi's work has taken the form of a painted visual diary.

In 'The Story of Myself and Some Friends in these Fragments of Daily Loves', a title borrowed from the Mexican writer Ernesto Banuelos Enriquez, he focuses on portraits of men, through which he explores ideas of masculinity, intimacy and desire. The images, which evoke vulnerability and raw emotion, can be seen as a radical shift within Qureshi's oeuvre, signaling his maturing awareness of the self, that manifests in stark political and visceral ways.

We are pleased to showcase this new body of work, which imbibes the spirit of our esteemed institution.

IMRAN AHMAD

Curator
Zahoor ul Akhlaq Gallery, NCA



We walk as pilgrims on this barren path way. On one side is the crashing sea of the Mediterranean full of promise, on the left a vast expanse of land at once desolate and at once populated.

We have been told that at the end of this area called a fountain, a space exists that may be of liberation and promise.

The land is free
Marked in a history of desire
We walk trudging along while the sun beats down.

A realization that this path extends long and beyond. There is no destination and there is no end but the promise takes us forward.

A promise never available before
For how could it be that this path would take one to the other-world, that beyond the coast and the black rock and the sand there would be a magical shift.

A motivation beyond our own physical self, borne out of years of disappointment and rejection.
We are unprepared and unfazed.

Walking

Waves crashing

Walking

Waves crashing

Walking

Waves crashing

There is a break in stillness.

Barefooted one feels the waves under one's feet.
As we yearn for community this is but a distraction
We arrive at a pitstop.

A mass of rock waiting to be conquered. The almost mythical stories have told us that it is beyond this hike that the land awaits.

The black rock, laced and strewn with seaweed and human disposal

We climb up, walk across barefooted, in the almost prickling sand.

From this vantage point we can see even more in the distance as the land and the sea continue on and on in one seamless uninterrupted view

A squint reveals the sign of human presence or two. Beyond the land and beyond civilization there is the promised distance.

It serves as an adrenaline shot –
Now sweating, while the water still heaves we continue to make our way.

Walking

Waves crashing

Walking

Waves crashing

Walking

Waves crashing

There is no break in the stillness

How long will we go on before we break?
Ultimately, there is disappointment. Like always
We turn back and walk away
Back to where it all started.



Untitled (Alaçatı series)
2016
enamel paint on inkjet print
19 x 25 cm

Untitled (Alaçatı series)
2016
enamel paint on inkjet print
19 x 25 cm



Untitled (Alaçatı series)
2016
enamel paint and collage on inkjet print
19 x 26 cm



Untitled (Alaçatı series)
2016
enamel paint on inkjet print
19 x 25 cm



Untitled (Alaçatı series)
2016
enamel paint on inkjet print
19 x 25 cm (each)



Left:

Muneeb
2016

enamel paint on canvas
168 x 243 cm

Hashim's lover(s)
2016

enamel paint on canvas
61 x 92 cm





Right:
The Dream Chaser
2016
enamel paint on canvas
168 x 198 cm

Farhan IV
2016
enamel paint on canvas
45 x 60 cm
collection of Mahnum Kabir





Samrose as Elvis
2016
enamel paint on canvas
106 x 137 cm

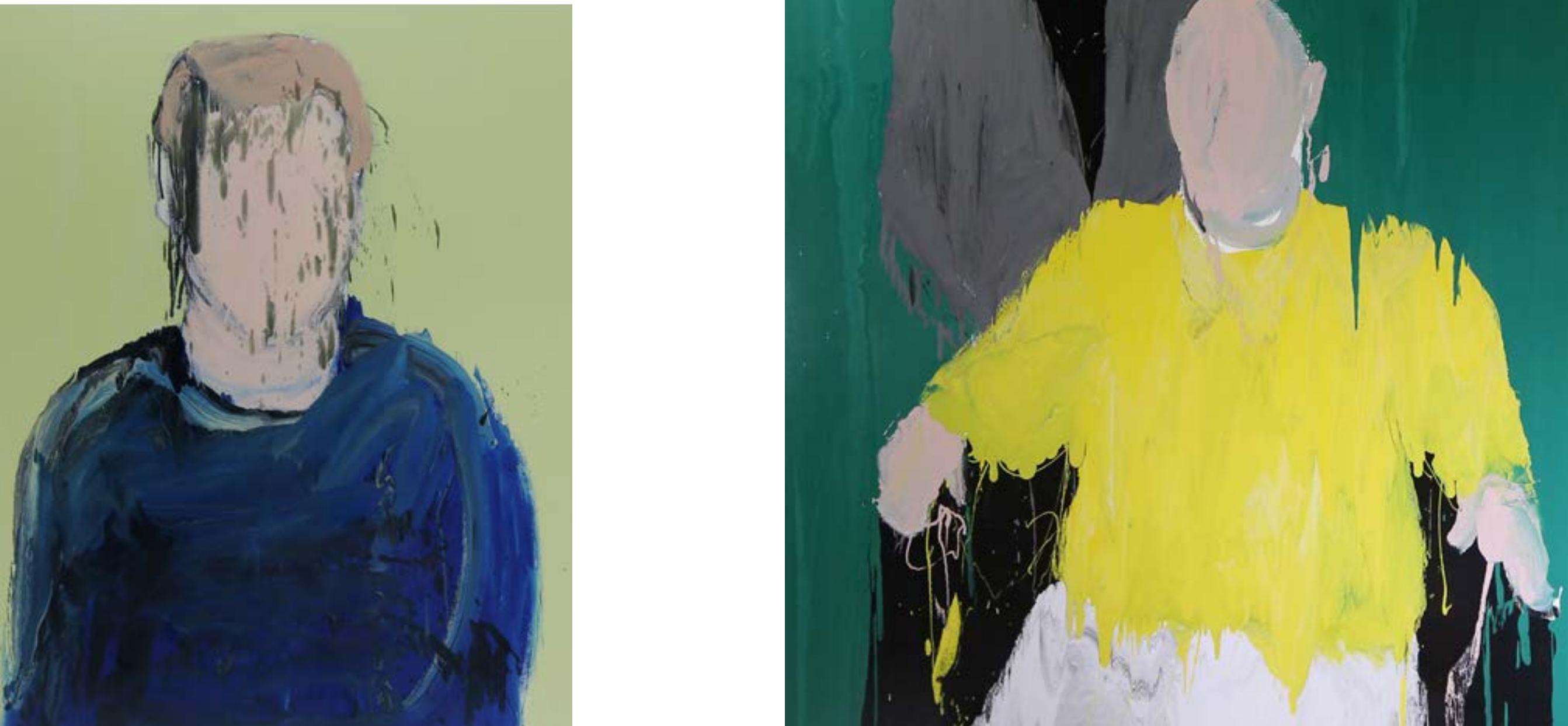


Nude I
2016
enamel paint on canvas
137 x 168 cm
collection of Jamie Munn

Right:

Family portrait III: Roman and Vittorio
2016
enamel paint on canvas
168 x 229 cm
courtesy Levca collection

Rabi
2016
enamel paint on canvas
107 x 137 cm





Right:
Aziz II
2016
enamel paint on canvas
168 x 198 cm

Rehan
2016
enamel paint on canvas
152 x 244 cm





Salman III
2016
enamel paint on canvas
61 x 91 cm



Sohaib
2016
enamel paint on canvas
91 x 91 cm



The Trainer
2017
enamel paint on canvas
168 x 198 cm



Farhan I
2017
enamel paint on canvas
168 x 198 cm



The Headless Unicorn
2017
enamel paint on canvas
107 x 137 cm

Left:
5 set of HIT today
2017
enamel paint on canvas
168 x 198 cm



Farhan III
2017
enamel paint on canvas
168 x 198 cm
collection of Nasir Mehmood



Farhan II
2017
enamel paint on canvas
168 x 198 cm
collection of Yasmin Khan

Rafiq,

I have vivid recollections of the white shirt and the navy trouser. The name Rafiq, embroidered on the pocket of your white shirt in the same blue. Thick as thieves, both, your perversity and you, arm in arm. Your thoughts engorged, throbbing, their vessels overwhelmed by the sudden rush of carnal filth.

I remember 10 years later, the rage that came with the sudden realization and the anger that morality deemed worthy.

I am 7 years old again, and again, and again. I can taste your mouth and the air permeating with the scent of your sexual squalor. I can see you standing in the stairwell, pulling your cock out of your pants, fucking those feelings of guilt.

I am depraved now. Defiled. Friends with sexual deviance, whatever that is, and I wonder what that beautiful cock would feel like in my mouth. It makes me hard. Shameful, but I don't fucking care. Wet, man scented, shame.

This must be when I say you don't have that power over me anymore, or some self help pansy ass shit people say, a 'FUCK YOU!' note, to get over suffering. Fuck that. I don't know if I'm over it. I'm not, I am sitting here writing about it, but I'm done sympathizing.

So this all started when one night I was jogging down the street, when this guy stops by and offers me a ride. I was 17 back then so I sat in his car. As we drove away, he grabbed out my cock after having a conversation which clicked to him that I wouldn't freak out. Later he went down on me, and to be honest it was something I enjoyed too much. After he was done, we talked a bit and he asked me what my scene was and whether I had met guys around town. I was like no, and that is it normal to do all this living in a country like Pakistan? So he was like there's a whole lot here. He brought up this app grindr, where you find all guys of similar interest.

When he dropped me back home, the first thing I did was download grindr as I have always wanted to explore new things. So I started seeing people from grindr, some good some okay. It wasn't long before I fell in love with this one person and that was something really cool, I had never felt this way before for a man atleast, for a woman yes. But after a few months I realized we were a disaster written on the wall, time and age was a major issue which messed up things and I felt that this was substance-less, so we parted.

It was then that I made up my mind that man-to-man relationships simply don't work here, so it's better to fool around rather than sticking to one person.

NOT MAN ENOUGH

I want to be in lust, of course.

At 15 I tried. My heart would pound so loud that I could hear it while meeting the many men I did not want to meet.

At 25 I pushed. Love is three times a week at least or we're over!

At 30 I planned. An orgy for tonight. My heart's not in it but I should go. I'm supposed to want it all the time... I really should go.

I should be better at this.

I want to be in lust, of course, but.

The person I should hate the most, I miss the most. I was young, innocent, and extremely naïve. I hated myself for being myself, I wanted to change, I wished to be that cheapster who stands on roadsides and catcalls at passing girls, just so that I could feel the normality of being... well... normal.

Just when I was at my lowest, self-esteem wise, he came into my life. He made me believe that I was normal. That this was normal. We were normal, and it was magical. We would fight from time to time but most of the days, it was perfect. He knew me like I didn't know myself. There were breakfasts in bed, slow dancing at midnight with my feet on his feet, him whispering promises of a life together, living together, cooking together, running away together. Previously, I had never believed that it could be possible.

Two sinners, one sin, a happily ever after.

I would be scared that people might find out and we would be shunned. He would instantly kiss me secretly in public and be like, let them find out, we have each other. HE made me believe it was all possible. I had the strength I never had previously to fight the world and fight my inner turmoil.

I felt normal. Happy. Truly, happy.

And just like that. He left.

His reason: too scared that people might find out about us.

I cried when he told me that we should break up. I begged him to take me back. Forgive me. I did this routine not for a week or a month but for four years.

He never did.

I don't hate him. I thank him for doing this to me, because it made me realize that my life, this life, is better spent alone. Not lonely but alone.

I miss him. I miss him a lot. But I can never have him back. Believe me, I have tried. We have tried but that innocent love, and those moments will never come back.

We are both too tainted now.

I remember growing up awkward, coming across confident and loud but insecure as they come. I was more interested in wearing dresses and rocking my heels and playing house when I was 4. As I grew older that changed. But even as a guy with a beard and mustaches people can still see through the layers. Labeled as gay long before I experimented with any man, cause apparently being emotional is for women and men who are not manly enough. Sometimes I think everyone can see through it except for the people who I care the most for. But then again I can't blame them; I took the longest to accept it myself too.

I was in my late teens when I met him first. I didn't like him at all. Found him obnoxious and was surprised how people around me could stand him. But then he grew on me, we would talk daily, share our concerns and be there for each other, I would notice him checking me out. From that time to our first kiss it took over 6 years, but it was always considered as good friendship by both of us, and I was still in the state of mind that my sexuality was a phase. Anyways that kiss ruined everything, it was followed by 2 years of me trying to make amends, accepting who I was and dealing with his abuse because he was too deep in the closet. The final brick in the wall was when he said "we can be friends, but don't hug me," that was the moment I stopped and moved on.

I am a very honest person and I would like to forget about my first time because he lied to me about everything which was at 27. I found someone at the same time. He is someone that my friends call "ser per tail laga ker, motorcycle per apnay 2 bacho ko phiranay wala". Anyways I found him on a chatting site, I could see his shoulders and his overgrown beard. He was slim and with all that rough beard still had his boyish charm. He was cute, smart, funny and we had so much in common because he practically did the same stuff as I was going through only a couple of years before me. I fell in love with him instantly when he asked me if he could put some clothes on, he was feeling shy since we were only talking. We talked the whole night. Around the time I was supposed to wake up he told me the truth about the lies he had told me during the night; he was married, got divorce papers the same day. I tried hating him but I couldn't, I was giving him a hard time but still wanted him to be around.

Since we were in different countries we were only in contact over the phone and facebook messenger, we would use it in a similar fashion as kids these days use snapchat. Anyways he blocked me on all platforms after 6 months. He has married again and has a daughter now. I tried seeing him for a coffee but even though a refusal at the airport terminal sucks, somehow I understood his concern, maybe I have grown to understand that one should protect what they have instead of chasing after a fantasy... tried dating different people after him but nothing compares to him. But it's not all bad I would say, you meet people who are actually more interesting than your average gay jokes making friends. Most recent would be an opera singer, who would disagree that a private concert only for one is not a superb deal.

Anyways now I am surrounded by friends some of whom know about my reality, others who are not out, which kind of makes a support group, especially now that I am approaching my thirties. I have been engaged to a girl, more of a thing I am doing for my parents, following his footsteps (to show my devotion to him) than for myself, not every change is easy but considering she deserves more than I am currently able to provide scares me. I hope I prove to be better for her sake cause for myself I am a lost cause and demented soul. And I would say it's a good time to get rid of the portrait that he didn't accept that I painted for him on his birthday.

TWO WORLDS

I had known as a child that I was different, growing up I found myself living in two worlds. It's been like this because of my background. My background is at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly confused. This confusion makes me primarily who I am today. I am what Ghalib would call,

غلمت کدہ میں میرے شب غم کا جوش ہے
اک شمع ہے دلیل سحر، سو خاموش ہے

The first time I was undressed, was by a man who took advantage of a child, the child redressed himself only to be undressed again and perhaps he was never truly dressed again, thus living in a constant state of undress. My eyes have seen my own image in the mirror from the sight of the 'other'. So as I pose in a state of undress I await to be dressed, perhaps that is what I look for in a partner; someone who would dress the undressed unreservedly and silently. My self has been divided in two worlds – that of an adult and of a child, living simultaneously in a single body. The child in me has forgiven the actor but refuses to forget the act that restructured the foundation of my life. The adult in me looks for a reason for the pervert act and questions the absent pervert actor. This quest to find an answer to end the angst in my self has become my reason to exist.

I will end as I began, with Ghalib,

میری سنو جو دیدہ عبرت نگاہ ہو گوش نصیحت منہ ھوش ہے
 DAG فراغ صحبت شب کی جلی ہوئی
 اک شمع رہ گئی ہے، سو وہ بھی خاموش ہے

Julfi,

I was 14 years old and so was he, in fact there were several of them. We were really just having fun until it wasn't fun anymore. Until we realised we weren't 14 but 17 now and all that stuff was for boys who didn't know better. We also found out we had feelings, that was probably the thing that really stopped it all.

I had to leave Pakistan before I could find out what a loving, intimate relationship looked like, and it was a beautiful but by no means smooth four years, and as partners do, we separated as our paths now clearly diverged.

What does freedom to love and be intimate look like in Pakistan? It is only the lovers who see it, the trusted friends behind closed doors, the ultimate sacred space.



















































The Wrestling Priest
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
56 x 71 cm



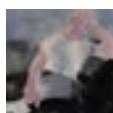
The bed
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Muneeb I
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm
collection of Saba Hamid



Muneeb II
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
56 x 71 cm



Muneeb III
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Muneeb IV
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Muneeb V
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Aziz I
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Aziz reads
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Aziz is cold
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
56.5 x 76.5 cm



There was nothing to talk about...
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



I always confused love
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Selfie I
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



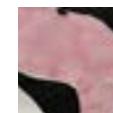
Selfie II
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
56 x 71 cm



Selfie III
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
56.5 x 76.5 cm



Send me a picture I
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Send me a picture II
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
56.5 x 76.5 cm



4th Date
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Thinking about Identity
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



The dream II
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



The dream III
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



The dream IV
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



Tall, Dark and Handsome
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm



First Time
2017
watercolor and chinese ink on paper
55 x 75 cm

EDUCATION

2017 - 2018

Fellowship: Art and International Cooperation
University of Arts
Zurich

2010 - 2011

MA Fine Art
Chelsea College of Art and Design
London

2007 - 2010

BA (Honors) Fine Art
Chelsea College of Art and Design
London

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2017

The Story of Myself and Some Friends in these
Fragments of Daily Loves
Zahoor ul Akhlaq Gallery
Lahore

2016

Untitled
Canvas Gallery
Karachi

2014

The Exalted State
VM Art Gallery
Karachi

2013

Wandering Forms, curated by Aasim Akhtar
The Potohar Gallery
Rawalpindi

Wandering Forms, curated by Aasim Akhtar
Alhamra Art Gallery
Lahore

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2017

Imago Mundi Project
Venice

2016

Open Field, curated by Aasim Akhtar
Pakistan National Council of the Arts
Islamabad

2015

Dialogue: Abstraction, curated by Aziz Sohail
Art Chowk Gallery
Karachi

2014

Size and scale are not the same...
DUCTAC
Dubai

Fresh
Amin Gulgee Gallery
Karachi

Void
Gallery 39K
Lahore

2012

Passion for Freedom Festival
Unit 24 Gallery
London

New Arrangements
The Drawing Room Gallery
Lahore

Mile End Art Pavilion
Regents Canal Festival 2012
London

2011

Group Exhibition, curated by Tatiana Ojjeh,
TAG Chalet
Dubai Air Show
Dubai

ARTIST RESIDENCIES

2017

VASL Artists' Collective
Karachi

WORK EXPERIENCE

2007 - 2016

Founder
Gallery 39K
Lahore

2013 - 2016

Senior Consultant Arts
British Council
Lahore

2013 - 2015

Associate Professor
National College of Arts
Lahore

2012 - 2015

Senior Lecturer
Pakistan Institute of Fashion Design
Lahore

CONFERENCES

2015

Participant: Living as a Minority
Muslim Jewish Conference
Berlin

Speaker: The Traumatic Past
THAAP International Conference
Lahore

2014

Speaker: The Space of the Mughal Miniature
THAAP International Conference
Lahore



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Aziz Sohail, for always being a critical mirror.

Maarya Rehman, for being the perfect ally.

And finally, **Muneeb, Rehan, Zulfi, Hashim, Samrose**, and all my beautiful muses:

Thank you for being yourself, and becoming my inspiration. For allowing me to look at you, and in turn see myself. May this be a step towards unsilencing our collective voices.

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