

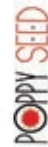
Querying the Label

Pakistani Artists' Responses to the Term 'Islamic Art'
Curated by Fatima Quraishi and Sumbul Khan.

Opening Reception: Saturday, October 23rd, 2010

The Exhibition continues until November 7th, 2010.

Imran Mir
Riffat Alvi
Shakira Masood
Asif Sharif
Manizhe Ali
Asad Hussain
Marium Agha
Raza Zaidi
Fasiha Batool
Mehwish Jawad
Zaid Hameed



First floor, Shafi Courts, Merewether Road, Karachi. Ph: 35693808. Email: poppyseed.gallery@gmail.com
Blog URL: www.poppyseedgallery.wordpress.com

Querying the Label Pakistani Artists' Responses to the Term 'Islamic Art'



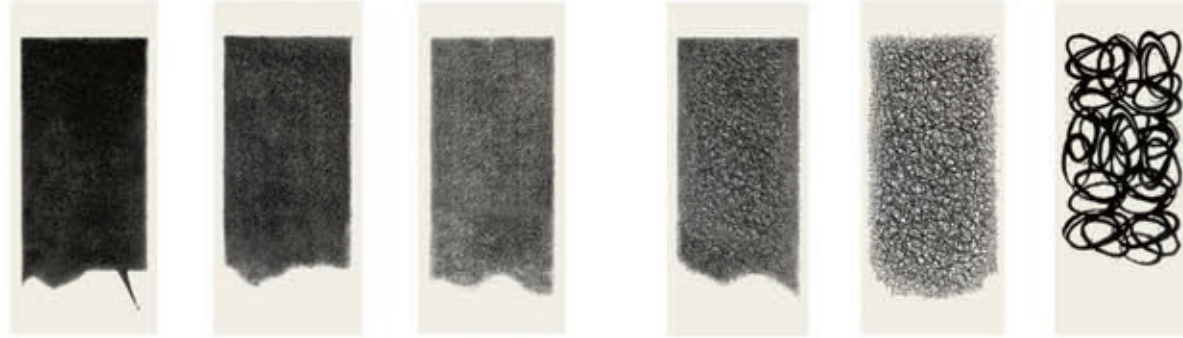
Curated by Fatima Quraishi and
Sumbul Khan.

October 23rd-November 7th, 2010

POPPY SEED

First floor, Shafi Courts, Merewether Road, Karachi.
Ph: 35693808. Email: poppyseed.gallery@gmail.com
Blog URL: www.poppyseedgallery.wordpress.com

"Querying the Label" seeks to question the parameters of categorization in Euro-American Art History, particularly in its definition of Islamic Art. The latter concern is of particular interest to Muslim nations as we have a stake in the quest for definition and identity making. To problematize the notion of Islamic Art beyond "art produced in the Islamic world", artists were invited through an open call to "... explore what it means ... to be an artist whose world/life is informed and/or influenced and/or inspired by Islamic culture/practice/ideology or paradoxically, the complete lack thereof." Evident in the works and artists' statements is the multiplicity/plurality of influences that inform the understanding of Islamic as a religious,



Imran Mir. Untitled. 2009. Acrylics on canvas. 96" x 42".

cultural, personal and critical signifier.

In some artists' works 'Islamic Art' is interpreted as works about Islam, and their relationship with Belief. Shakira Masood's work for instance, speaks of a human being's understanding of her/his Creator and interestingly does so with figurative vocabulary, traditionally considered anathema to Islamic sensibility. Riffat Alvi derives inspiration from Surah Rehman's lyrical description of the earth and its translates it into an installation of a calligraphic chime of sorts.

In Asad Hussain, Manizhe Ali, Marium Agha and Raza Zaidi's works, the commentary shifts from the spiritual to the popular practice of Faith. Asad Hussain takes a wishful stance whereby absolute peace and harmony could be attained

if people's lives were in line with the five principal tenets of the religion. Manizhe's film focuses on the ludicrous obsession with Halal/Haram where what is apparently acceptable/forbidden dictates consumption regardless of whether or not daily attitudes towards interpersonal dealings are according to Islamic teachings. Marium Agha keys in on pseudo clerics and their "glossed over," holier-than-thou appearances which cloak ignorance and deception. Raza Zaidi's series of headless bodies highlights the mindless following of ritual that largely constitutes religious practice today, echoing Manizhe's concerns of superficiality in religion.

In counterpoint, some works rely wholly on the traditional understanding of the category and are equally valent because they establish a concrete lineage with history. Mehwish Jawad and Zaid Hameed's use of calligraphy on jewelry and ceramics harks back to the importance of the object in Islamic history. Asif Sharif vies for a return to tradition through his choice of medium and technique, fresco and *sozankari*, and iconography. The use of Islamic symbolism in geometrical patterns is likewise referenced in Fasiha Batool's work.

Although Imran Mir's work also references geometry in his use of the grid as a basic building component, it is taken entirely out of the traditional realm of Islamic symbolism, engaging instead, with minimalist and post



Fasiha Batool. *Untitled*. 2008. Ink and thread on handmade paper. 8.5" x 10.5".



Marium Agha. *Mullah ki Lipgloss*. 2010. Digital print. 81.79cm x 81.11cm.



Manizhe Ali. *PAK HALAL COSMETICS*. 2010. Film still.



Riffat Alvi. *An Affair with the Earth*. 2010. Digital print. 4.25" x 5.5".



Zaid Hameed. *Untitled*. 2010. Ceramic and glaze.

modern concerns.

The significance of this show is in its documentation of artists' responses to a theoretical label. The responses received emphasize the disconnect between the academic discipline of Art History, largely centered in the West, and the actual practice of art production. As curators, we were interested in the reaction to the over-broad label of Islamic Art, but the artists did not address the in/adequacy of the label itself, suggesting that the term has little currency outside of theoretical discussions. The focus on spirituality and/or religious practice and the rejection of the conflation of Art with Islam seem to indicate the primacy accorded to Art as a social commentary on religion, and not as a cause of it. This reminder of the polarity between Art History and Art Practice enriches theory by complicating it much further than we had envisioned, by not simply redefining the label, but by abandoning it altogether.

Fatima Quraishi and Sumbul Khan
Curators

Shakira Masood. *Receiving*. 2010. Oil on canvas. 18" x 24".



Raza Zaidi. *Untitled*. 2010. Acrylics on canvas. 20"x30".



Mehwish Jawad. *Untitled (Two Ayats of Surah-e-Falaq)*. 2010. Gold plated silver earrings.



Asad Hussain. *Breath (detail)*. 2010. Leatherette, pen, embroidery, pastels, acrylics. 8" x 8".