

**I  
have  
to  
tell  
you  
a  
story**

# I have to tell you a story

Aziz Sohail

The writing of art history has been to tell a story of the human condition. Since the explosion of the contemporary, there have been movements that this story so far has been told from patriarchal and heteronormative points of view. Movements and practices such as those by Guerrilla Girls in the United States have sought to unpack narrow understandings of art making as well as exhibitions, writings and discourse that has privileged men and their problematic depictions of the female body. Overtime, further dissent has addressed the erasure of black and non-western voices such as through the formative exhibitions 'The Other Story' curated by Rasheed Araeen or 'La Magiciens De La Terre' in Centre Pompidou, both in 1989.

Pakistan has also traversed this path with its own specificities. Our art practice also has a history of a male dominated paradigm, although commendable efforts have been and are being made in the realm of feminist art practice, such as through the pioneering work of Lala Rukh and scholarship of Salima Hashmi. In my own investigations around 1990's Karachi, I find a feminist movement emerging through the practices of artists such as Durriya Kazi, Asma Mundrawala and Naiza Khan who were not just groundbreaking practitioners, but also led on key initiatives and projects that created institutions.

In this regard, one must hope that we are also witnessing a recognition of histories beyond the heteronormative in Pakistan. There are signs of an emergent queer movement in Pakistani art practices. This visibility of form and connections is evident in a series of practices that have existed in earlier works by individuals such as Anwar Saeed and now more recently in the works of artists such as Abdullah Qureshi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Globally, there has been a need to recognize new histories in art where now there is a desire to recover the voice of the subaltern. However, as we know from Gayatri Spivak we know that the voice of the subaltern can never be recovered. In this regard the voices of the ancestors are lost.

It is now upto us as historians to recognize the tracing of an old history may be impossible but new histories are created. It is in this regard that one must investigate the painterly practices of both Amna Rahman and Numair A. Abbasi, who are emerging practitioners who have situated their work in a strong ethos of sexuality, gender and desire but breaking from the norm of straight and dated narratives.

Narratives of queerness so far have existed within solitude and invisibility. Queerness can be very lonely, and many individuals spend their whole lives in a spiritual anguish due to the nature of society and its acceptance. They are also forced to remain invisible. Practices and movements have looked at these issues, and depicted solitude as well as a politics of invisibility.

However, in the emergent practices of Rahman and Abbasi we see these paradigms shifting, where there is a new politics of visibility and an emphasis on the encounter with the other. Both artists, who were trained at National College of Arts Lahore and Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi respectively, deploy the use of the figure to reclaim a narrative that had been lost to them and their peers.

Their practices emanate from the personal, where their own encounters and experiences are depicted, almost like stories from a graphic novel or a film as small bits and pieces into a larger life. Through painting and drawing, they draw the viewer into vignettes and stories, sometimes decontextualized, but open to further interpretations.

In this exhibition, one notes that Abbasi's practice has evolved into an anonymous figure, juxtaposed in acts of sex, as well as intimacies that always remain haunting and limited. He uses text to further evolve and pierce through the minds of his protagonists, in order to allow the viewer access further into the stories he wishes to tell. Rahman's figures similarly embody moments before or after intimacies, in almost voyeuristic ways. Whereas in the past she has focused more on loneliness in the presence of the singular, here the multiplicity of the figures denotes sexual but not emotional encounter. The gaze still haunts

the viewer due to its pain and longing.

Both artists can be placed in larger bodies of painterly practices that exist in our world and their works cannot be construed as existing within a single geography or locale. Their international approach thus allows for larger engagements with other histories of queer practice to emerge. Indeed, one may think of the literary works of Oscar Wilde, Alan Hollinghurst, or Leslie Feinberg. This connection with the literary allows the work to transcend notions of the visual and allow for further relationships to emanate.



## Artist's Statement

Being a figurative painter, I am very much interested in the form of human body. It is a very sensitive subject for me. When I look at a person, I observe how the bones are placed, how the mass of what we call skin and meat has shaped on the body. When I paint, it is natural for me to add a grotesque feel to the skin. That is how I conceive the outer image of people.

My project includes conventionally painted women, including myself as the subject of my paintings. I am fascinated by the formal structure of the female figure, how the curves appear when two bodies are in contact with each other, capturing the considerable impact of the weight that falls on the body of the other person around, altering the natural form due to proximity, making the skin swell or depress under the encumbrance.

## Biography

Amna Rahman was born in 1993 in Lahore, Pakistan. Her schooling was completed in Karachi. After graduating from The Lyceum School, Rahman received her BFA from National College of Arts Lahore in 2017 (passed with distinction in Painting). She is currently working as a visual artist in Karachi. Her works have been featured in several group exhibitions, including 'Department Store' (curated by Muhammad Zeeshan) at Sanat Gallery, Karachi (2017), 'Microcosm' (curated by Adeel uz Zafar) at Gandhara Art Space, Karachi (2017) and UglyPretty (curated by Aziz Sohail) at Taseer Art Gallery, Lahore (2017).



**Untitled, 2017**

*Oil on canvas, 75 x 57.5 cm*



**Untitled, 2017**  
*Oil on canvas, 105 x 75 cm*





**Untitled, 2017**

*Oil on canvas, 75 x 105 cm*





**Untitled, 2017**  
*Oil on canvas, 60 x 84 cm*







**Untitled, 2017**

*Oil on canvas, 100 x 110 cm*



# Artist's Statement

## Ice, Ice, Baby

Extrapolated from handpicked personal encounters – in particular those instances when one has felt intimate to someone they previously never felt close to, and adversely those moments when one has sensed distance and a disconnect from someone they emotionally laid bare before – the culminating series reflects on those obscure memories that either stubbornly resist erasure, or escape embalment.

While performing the act of undressing in a stranger's presence, the men willfully orchestrate and maneuver the interpersonal dynamics in human relationships. In doing so, they not only undergo discomfort, shame, vulnerability, desire, (and their respective antitheses) but also demonstrate how we experience intimacy, how we retreat, how we love, and how we overcome.

## Biography

Numair A. Abbasi is an emerging artist, freelance writer and photographer who completed his BFA with a distinction from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi in 2014. Formally trained in sculpture and photography, Abbasi finds the play of fabric and the male human body most reciprocating. Consequentially, he coalesces the two domains and fabricates narratives that stage a personal or social discourse – often arisen from anecdotes either experienced or witnessed. Abbasi further critiques the politics behind social gender constructs while also attempting to burst the myopic perception towards the canon of male nudes. He has also attained diplomas in the French language awarded by the French Ministry of Education. Abbasi is currently practicing full time as a visual artist and reviews art exhibitions for various publications.







***"Let's take this to another room, shall we?", 2018***  
*Mixed media on Montval paper, 194 x 152 cm*



***“You do know what hands in the pockets mean, right?”***, 2018  
*Mixed media on Montval paper, 180 x 152 cm*



***"Now this one for our moms", 2018***  
*Mixed media on Montval paper, 183 x 152 cm*



***“Are you an artist by any chance?”***, 2018  
*Mixed media on Montval paper, 152 x 132 cm*



***"Stop, collaborate, and listen."***, 2018  
Mixed media on Montval paper, 122 x 152 cm







***"Let me whisper this in your ear so he does not hear it.," 2018***  
*Mixed media on Montval paper, 152 x 106 cm*



*"You know what the trick to tying a shalwar is?", 2018  
Mixed media on Montval paper, 169 x 152 cm*



This publication accompanies the exhibition

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Numair A. Abbasi



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Numair A. Abbasi

