

# A Journey of Non-Figurative Sculpture in Pakistan Developmental Course of Sculpture in Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim of the Study:** The objective of this research is to provide information on the development, relevance, and specific artists who have contributed to the non-figurative sculpting trend in the nation. This study tries to answer questions: What has been historical development of non-figurative sculpture in Pakistan, and how does it relate to contemporary art movements around the world?

**Methodology:** The context, content, and form of the non-figurative sculptures are examined in order to comprehend their communicative potential and visual language. Additionally, the works are placed within the backdrop of last seven decades' evolving social realities, which influenced sculptors' methods in a variety of ways. This study intends to shed light on the distinctive qualities and subjects investigated in non-figurative sculpture in Pakistan, as well as its reception and recognition within art community, using a combination of qualitative analysis and historical research.

**Findings & Conclusion:** It is concluded that the sculptors of Pakistan created non-figurative sculptural art among figurative representation through their innovative ideas and variety of techniques. The work of Anjum Ayaz features an abstract representation of domestic abuse in an artistic way.

**Keywords:** Non-Figurative, Pakistan Sculpture, Visual Language, Self-expression.

## Article History

Received:  
September 13, 2023

Revised:  
November 05, 2023

Accepted:  
December 10, 2023

Published:  
December 30, 2023

## Introduction

Southeast Asia is considered the cradle of the Indus Valley civilization. A survey of artifacts from Harappa suggests that the concept of representation for objects with profane values is ingrained in the social spirit of the region. Later, the Kushan and Gupta empires experienced times of stability in which spiritual and social lives were well depicted in stone carvings sprawling all across the region in form of temples, palaces, and other dwellings. Greek, Persian, Arab, and central Asian invaders brought their regional influences to the visual culture of the region. South Asian sculpture has its roots in the Indus Valley Civilization and Mehrgarh, 7000 BCE (Possehl, 2002). The ancient civilization shaped the development of sculpture, determining its course and solidifying its significance in the region's cultural heritage (Kenoyer, 1998). Women's representations in terracotta figures show an early artistic sensibility and aptitude for shaping materials into likenesses (Kenoyer, 1998). The legacy was carried on, as evident

by the sculptures created in India during the Mauryan, Gupta, and Chola eras, as well as the Gandhara and Mathura schools of art (Coomaraswamy, 1927). During ancient times, artists created stone sculptures on a grand scale that frequently featured gods. This shows that they had command over stone carving (Coomaraswamy, 1927). Furthermore, some items and design elements have symbolic meaning, turning them into visual metaphors (Zimmer, 1946). There are many tales of gods and goddesses in Hindu mythology, many of which use language to reveal deeper truths and universal forces (Doniger, 2009). Each sculpture was a sacred link between the spiritual realms because it used the visual language of sculpture to convey the divine (Eck, 1998).

Islamic doctrines and practices influenced a force that significantly changed societal structure and culture as the Delhi Sultanate rose to power and established itself (Eaton, R.M., 1996). This time period saw a change in many facets of society, including social norms, artistic practices, and architectural styles. Due to its status as an empire, the Delhi Sultanate put restrictions on figurative expression in accordance with Islamic law (Flood, F.B., 2002). Hindu temples served as safe havens for religious sculptors, and they continued producing them on a large scale (Tartakov, 1997). Sculpture saw a remarkable renaissance in the Subcontinent during colonial control (Guha-Thakurta, 1992). This was demonstrated through the placement of sculptures honoring individuals in public spaces. The British monarchs, who sought to dominate, commissioned sculptures of King Edward and Queen Victoria and placed them in key areas (Mitter, 2001). As a result, sculpture's meaning shifted from religious to representation of the British monarchy. On one hand, they were fascinated by the tradition of sculpting that focused on realism and lifelike representations. On the other hand, they also incorporated a deep-rooted indigenous sensibility with a rich tradition of symbolism (Jain, 2001). In place of religious or spiritual consumers, sculptors started appealing to the interests and preferences of their clientele, the modern Western upper class (Gupta, 2002).

Pakistan was established in 1947, giving a new surface to write down the national identity of the people of the region. Pakistani sculptors recognized their role as cultural ambassadors and change agents, navigating the sociopolitical landscape and encouraging positive development. The aim of the study is to highlight the dominant factors that have driven the artistic practices of the sculptors working in Pakistan. The creative process, aesthetics, medium, influences, and intellectual pursuits all come into play for a final visual outcome.

### ***Study Objectives***

The objective of this research is to provide information on the development, relevance, and specific artists who have contributed to the non-figurative sculpting trend in the nation. The study seeks to understand the motivations, inspirations, and mental processes that shape the art of local sculptors. The study examines the art works of Pakistani sculptors and investigates the underlying motivations, formal concerns, and social phenomena relevant to their works.

### ***Significance of the Study***

The study brings into limelight some significant intellectual, social, and political factors that have tuned artistic expression in Pakistan over the past few decades. . In the process of investigation, light is also shed on some external influences that have encouraged the adoption of non-figurative expression.

### ***Research Methodology***

The study uses a research strategy that incorporates qualitative methodologies to examine the development of non-figurative sculpture in Pakistan. Through a review of scholarly articles, books, exhibition catalogs, and research publications, the study builds a framework, defines concepts, and provides insights into the historical context and critical viewpoints. To achieve the objectives, the data is gathered, interpreted, synthesized, and critically examined. To ensure the legitimacy and rigor of the research, the interpretations are supported by references to other works of literature and theoretical frameworks.

### ***Sculpture Making in Pakistan***

The partition of the Subcontinent into Pakistan and India took place. The state's desire for modernism and exposure to outside influences led to stylistic shifts in artistic expression. In Pakistan, from 1977 to 1988, the interpretation of the Islamic prohibition against the portrayal of human beings tightened under the Islamization push, having a profound impact on sculptors. This belief, which stipulates that creating figures of humans or animals is prohibited as it could lead to idolatry, essentially outlawed figurative sculpture. This was a particularly harsh blow to the sculptors who relied on these forms for their expression. The ability of the artists themselves to adapt and persevere during this time was a major factor in the sculpture field's survival. Sculptors continued to produce their art despite the severe repression and a lack of assistance because they were passionate about it and felt the need to convey their viewpoints. Their inventiveness and dedication to their trade are evidenced by their capacity to work around the limitations and continue to create meaningful works. Many sculptors who had emigrated to countries with better working conditions never came back. Those who persisted had to put in a lot of effort to revive their professions and the sculpture industry.

Between 1987 and 1999, the state experienced a time of turbulent democracy plagued by widespread terrorism, which received responses from artists in their individual ways. The unrest, fear, and internal dialogue regarding the causes of that chaos can be traced in most artworks from that era. Similar to other artistic disciplines, the world of sculpture saw considerable changes from 1999 to 2008. The period allows artists to experiment with new artistic styles and mediums. Sculptors were inspired to rebel against established norms, placing a stronger focus on individual expression and flair.

On the one hand, sculptors were encouraged to experiment and create because of their increased artistic freedom. Through their work, they began to experiment with unusual materials, ventured into abstract representations, and questioned social norms. The sculpture culture was vibrant and inventive, demonstrating liberal policies and burgeoning individualism. But just as it did for the rest of society, this time period provided a problem for sculptors as well. They were subject to criticism from more conservative segments of society who found it difficult to embrace or understand their innovative works because of the very freedom that allowed them to experiment and develop. Similar to their peers in other artistic disciplines, many sculptors encountered a dilemma. Even though their craft flourished in the supportive environment of creative freedom, artists had to deal with a backlash from the general public, who questioned the meaning and message of their paintings. However, they overcame these obstacles with bravery and resiliency, using their sculptures as a tool to spark discussion and engage their audience. They thus had a significant impact on the cultural environment of Pakistan during this transformational time.

### ***Non-Figurative Sculptures of Pakistan***

In 1937, Shahid Sajjad, a well-known sculptor from Pakistan, was born in Muzaffar Nagar, British India. Despite the challenges that limited his early education, he got support from a graphic designer and started creating work in 1952. He began his career as a book illustrator and finally worked his way up to become the chief artist of the Lintas Advertising Agency in Karachi in 1957. A journey to Europe in 1963 had a profound impact on him since it introduced him to the world of sculpture. His passion for sculpture was kindled by a chance encounter with Paul Gauguin's Tahitian woodcarving at the Louvre in Paris. Shahid rode his motorcycle across Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe between 1960 and 1963. His debut show, hosted by Faiz Ahmed Faiz in 1964, had a sizable collection of wooden reliefs. He began doing large-scale wood carvings in 1965 while residing in Chittagong, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), after becoming inspired by the people and events around him. He felt a great resonance with the simplicity and clarity of the tribal artisans, recognizing their coexistence with nature as a mark of true civilization. Shahid worked as an art director for a Karachi advertising business after returning from Chittagong in 1971.

After that, for almost two years, he created sets for a national dance company. He also traveled to China and Japan at this time, where he studied the lost-wax bronze casting method with Japanese sculptor Akio Kato, whom he regarded as his guru. He held a solo show of his bronze and wood sculptures at the Karachi Arts Council in 1974, and in 1977, he took top honors in sculpture at the National Show in Islamabad. He displayed his bronze sculptures at the Atelier BM in Karachi in 1978. The Pakistan Army then hired him to produce a bronze mural titled "Cavalry through the Ages," which he completed in 1981.



(Figure 1) Shahid Sajjad, A Place in Another Time, Bronze, 81cm, 2002

Courtesy: karachi scholl of arts library

The sculpture 'A Place in Another Time' reveals the inventive, inquisitive, and creative side of the artist's understanding (figure 1). The bronze sculpture, which represents a clever location with a distinctly unconventional exterior, is forged to resemble a small architectural paradigm. Here, the artistic design goes beyond the recognized limits of our universe and carries us to a place that seems weird and remote from our normal existence.

His sculptures communicate a variety of themes and ideas. Social norms, familial ties, human conflicts, apprehension, and the interconnectivity of male-female interactions the ideas are well communicated with skillful sculpting methods and distinctive style, which also encourage viewers to reflect on and engage with the ideas and feelings expressed in his work.

### **Anjum Ayaz**

Anjum Ayaz, born in 1949, earned a degree in painting and sculpture from Karachi School of Art in 1973. In 1975 and 1977, he organized sculpture shows at the Karachi Arts Council. Then, in 1993, he held another exhibition at Chowkandi Art, where he showed polished marble and metal forms. Anjum Ayaz has achieved success as a television actor and producer of well-known theater plays. Despite the fact that Akbar Naqvi refers to him as a failed painter in his book, *Image and Identity*, Anjum Ayaz views himself as a "public artist" and works to open up access to his work. He opposes relegating it to exhibition spaces like galleries and museums because he understands that relatively few Pakistanis will have the chance to see it there. As a result, his sculptures may be seen in many public places around Pakistani cities, such as parks, roundabouts, and beachfronts. Although the artist's creations have frequently been the target of vandalism, he maintains his optimism, saying, "Yes, it is painful, but I haven't lost hope."



(Figure 2) Anjum Ayaz, Posture I, Marble.

Courtesy: Indus valley school of arts library

The sculpture “Posture” features an abstract representation of the domestic abuse that women in our society experience (figure 2). It appears as a distressed face covered in arms and weeping pitifully. The way the arms are held suggests either terror or the effects of being battered. The lower body's posture also conveys surrender. The hard realities of social life cannot be ignored by an artist who was raised in a society. These facts have a profound impact on them, and they utilize their work to address them. The sculpture depicts a depressing aspect of our civilization. Although the sculpture's title, "Posture I," is neutral, even a cursory glance at it conjures up ideas and feelings about the dynamics of a sobbing shape.



(Figure 3) Anjum Ayaz, Cavity, Marble.

Courtesy: Indus valley school of arts library

Similarly, "Cavity" does not explicitly describe the type of figure, but with closer inspection, it is apparent that it is a female bust (figure 3). The inside of the head's hollow is shown. From these images, various conclusions might be drawn. One viewpoint is that the artist implies that women in our society lack intellectualism and are unable to think critically as men can. Another explanation is that women go through an identity crisis. Ayaz places a strong emphasis on the influence and dynamism of his sculptures, which reflect his perception of reality and the reaction he hopes the viewer will have. For instance, his impressive steel sculpture captures Ayaz's perspective on the grandeur of existence and inspires wonder and admiration.

### **Talat Dabir**

Talat Dabir, a Pakistani sculptor and educator born in 1945, has worked as an associate professor at the National College of Arts since 1977. Her work is renowned for its challenging subject matter and cutting-edge tools and methods. In recognition of the nebulous yet potent essence of human experiences, she seeks to give them concrete form. Talat frequently uses terracotta, a regional material, in his sculptures to explore the human condition. Her enormous cement sculpture, on display at the National Gallery, has interconnected characters that share a similar level of aesthetic sensibility. In exploring the relationship between men and women, Talat emphasizes how they travel through life together. Her writing shows worry about their common future. Her most recent piece, "*Hajoom*," (figures 4,5,6) depicts genderless figures occupying architectural spaces. These figures frequently include both male and female figures, are blended with other shapes, and occasionally are juxtaposed with natural or landscape features. Talat's artistic development has embraced the twentieth-century blend of abstraction and realism while keeping her uniqueness and being at the forefront of modern sculpture.

Her style, which is influenced by modern art, demonstrates her broad experience and remarkable abilities.



(Figure 4) Talat Dabir, Untitled 12 (*Hajoom*), Terra Cotta, 21.5cm x 58.4cm x 7.6cm, Rohtas Gallery

Courtesy: National College of Art's library





(Figure 5) Talat Dabir, Untitled 18(Hajoom), Terra Cotta, 40.6cm x 25.4cm x 7.6cm

Courtesy: National College of Art's library



(Figure 6) Talat Dabir, Untitled 19 (Hajoom), Terra Cotta, 50.6cm x 21.4cm x 7.6cm

Courtesy: National College of Art's library

"*Hajoom*" illuminates the current human-life issue. People in today's world frequently understand the idea of achievement but have lost touch with true joy. They are enamored with their own accomplishments and self-assurance to the point where they are oblivious to reality and future repercussions. History has demonstrated that the sins and cruelties of former generations frequently have an adverse effect on the

current generation. The younger generation, on the other hand, is becoming one that disregards the use of their intelligence and is a pathetic, careless, and irrational. When they do use their wits, it's usually to scheme, plan, and deceive rather than to learn or gain knowledge. It is common knowledge that one needs a solid background in knowledge and information in order to think.

Finding what is objectively possible or impossible is the practical challenge. Therefore, it is essential to pursue what is objectively possible and take advantage of any chance that presents itself. Positive results are more likely to result from planting seeds at the right moment. However, it is foolish to pursue something with constant optimism. It indicates a degree of obstinacy when the mind loses touch with reality. This kind of tenacity frequently results in heartbreak and failure and develops into an obsession. Moving ahead is crucial for us to do in order to escape this state of lethargy.

### **Khalil Chishtee**

Khalil Chishtee, born in 1964, pursued his Bachelor in Fine Arts at the National College of Arts in Lahore. After ten years of teaching at the National College of Arts in Lahore, he moved to the United States in 2001. He gives his perspective on using trash bags as a medium. He said that the number of trash bags he saw during his early days in New York City served as his motivation for using trash bags.

Chishtee's artistic repertoire has grown over time, enabling him to experiment with different spatial dimensions without giving up his straight-forward and clear construction techniques, which involve little altering of found things. He usually succeeds in drawing out unexpected joy from such unremarkable elements. However, some of his more recent works add darker undertones and more ominous implications to the experience.



(Figure 7) Khalil Chishtee, Game of Seduction II, Trash Bags, 2006

<http://constantly-immutable.blogspot.com/2013/11/the-sculptures-made-with-plastic-trash.html>

According to Khalil Chishtee, his reflection on disposability possibly considers the fragility of relationships purred by the transient and disposable character of waste bags. He uses plastic made from



polythene-based grocery bags because calcium, which is present in large amounts, makes plastic brittle and less flexible (figure 7). This brittleness makes sculpting easier since the plastic naturally sags when hanging due to gravity.

### **Jamil Baloch**

On June 12, 1972, Jamil Ahmad Baloch was born in Nushki (Chagai), Balochistan, Pakistan. His works are a reflection of his experiences in Baluchistan, where he originates from. Baloch effectively breaks down the layers of ornamentation and contrasts the human form's frailty with the unyielding grid. He uses laminated glass fiber-reinforced synthetic resins, notably polyesters, to create a lightweight but highly sturdy, long-lasting construction. His artwork depicts varied social behaviors that blend classic models with modernism, reflecting his vast cultural upbringing. He wants to keep Balochistan's customs and culture alive. Jamil Baloch is one of the artists who uses their art to spread educational ideas. His portrayals are not prejudiced; rather, they demonstrate his artistic sensibility and compassion. His goal is to keep his land from going down in history as a terrible place.



(Figure 8) Jamil Baluch, Cry II, Wood.

Catalog Jamil Bloch, Facts, 2005

The sculpture "Cry II" shows a female figure encased in a fabric like a *chaddar* (figure 8). It provides a graphic representation of the hardships faced by women in Baluchistan. By expertly using sparse carvings, the artist uses a reduced form. Despite being simplified, the sculpture's face has a mouth that is partially open and sends a strong statement in simplified stylized form.

## Ruby Chishtee

Ruby Chishtee's life is centered on creation, which is very important to her. She uses her artistic endeavors as a therapeutic outlet, drawing on her own experiences and her former identity. She reminisces about sewing dolls out of scrap fabric from old quilts and sacking as a youngster and combines traditional doll creation with modern sculpture. She examines gender dynamics, inequalities, and social critiques in her work, illuminating issues of power and violence. When Ruby creates art, she explores gender dynamics, inequalities, and social critiques while using comedy, subversion, and sarcasm to express her feelings and recollections. Her art offers a rich viewing experience because it stirs up emotions of sympathy as well as humor, subversion, and irony.

In her artistic endeavors, Ruby makes use of commonplace items like straw, cotton wool, plastic bags, cloth, and old newspapers. She frequently includes images of crows, buffaloes, and people in her stories, which are woven with a delicate sadness and dignified pathos. Her affinity for cloth is a result of both her own past and its representation of feminine workmanship.



(Figure 10) Ruby Chishtee, I love my prison, my prison loves me, Sanitary Napkin, 2010

<http://vaslart.org/ruby-chishti/>

Ruby's creative theory emphasizes the significance of art beyond its durability, citing instances of timeless concepts without a physical existence and bronze statues made of material that was later melted down for weapons. She holds that self-discovery, which enables her to give form to one's emotions and produce strange, lovely, hilarious, or poignant results, is the most crucial job for any artist. It's important to express one's distinctive experiences, thoughts, and feelings in the world of art, where creativity is valued.

Ruby Chishtee regularly uses her artwork to convey the idea of injustice because she has firsthand experience with society's prejudice against female children. In one piece, she uses menstruation pads to create a turban (figure 9), a representation of masculine dominance and power in the Subcontinent. This contradiction is striking because it makes fun of the social framework that views women as inferior. The turban's material selection draws attention to the irony that a man, who frequently upholds the enslavement of women, is descended from the same human species. Ruby presents an enchanting yet odd monument to unity as she fashions a male wedding headdress out of sanitary napkins, thread, and gold

lace. Ruby has created various pieces that are classified as "fiber and fabric paintings" by using scraps of fabric, thread, string, rope, wool, and cotton in a manner similar to how a fine artist uses a knife, brush, and oil on canvas.

## Humaira Abid

By departing from the traditional use of wood in her artwork, Humaira Abid creates a striking visual effect that breaks up the monotony. She not only deftly exploits the organic textures and hues present in many woods but also adds bronze to some of her smaller pieces. It is clear that the artist carefully considers the aesthetic balancing factor in both the object arrangement and the contrasting colors she uses. She admirably exhibits a profound emphasis on complex nuances, expressing them with accuracy and grace. Humaira Abid proves that her gender and whatever perceived difficulties it may bring cannot stop her ambition to attain distinction in her professional endeavors. Working with wood as her chosen medium requires not just expertise but also physical stamina. In reality, she welcomes the seemingly insignificant challenges because they serve as sources of creativity and inspiration. Humaira Abid uses a methodical process to carry out her creative vision. She starts by putting her notions into form through preliminary drawings of her planned piece. She then moves on to creating a maquette using materials like plaster, clay, or wax. She is able to fine-tune the size and shape of her artwork through this approach. Once the desired form is finalized, she procures the wood necessary for the project. Humaira captures the complete universe of traditional women in the sculptures of sewing machines (figure 10).



(Figure 10) Humaira Abid, Boy, Girl, Mahagonny, Pharwan and Pine

[http://humaira.com.pk/works/get\\_subcatagory\\_data/21/7](http://humaira.com.pk/works/get_subcatagory_data/21/7)

These tools stand for their relentless attempts to uphold family harmony, and in difficult times, they transform into a ray of hope, providing a source of income for struggling women. The sewing machines and pillows are given considerable meaning by the decision to sculpt them in wood, giving value to these common home items.



(Figure 11) Humaira Abid, Sculptor's Drawing Plahys, Wenge, 38cm x 20cm x variable thickness

[http://humaira.com.pk/works/get\\_subcatagory\\_data/46/12](http://humaira.com.pk/works/get_subcatagory_data/46/12)



(Figure 12) Humaira Abid, Untitled, Wenge, 38cm x 20cm x variable thickness

[http://humaira.com.pk/works/get\\_subcatagory\\_data/46/12](http://humaira.com.pk/works/get_subcatagory_data/46/12)

Artist Humaira specializes in employing wood, especially *sheesham*, to make her sculptures. Her work is primarily concerned with the complete composition of a sculpture, including its cut, outside form, inner space usage, and the interaction of form, gravity, and movement. Traditional writing boards, like "*takhti*," are frequently used as backgrounds in Humaira's sculptures to hold various objects. Her themes center on parenting and are influenced by her desire to tie her family together. Humaira has a straightforward and understated style, finding inspiration in commonplace imagery, clichéd views, various attitudes, relationships, agony and pleasure, several layers of meaning, comedy, and irony.

### Naiza Khan

A well-known modern artist, Naiza Khan was born in Pakistan in 1968. Her work explores the sensuality of the female body and its "weight, opacity, and resistance in relation to the societal structure." However, she has increasingly embraced the use of strong and unyielding metal objects directly related to the body, such as chastity belts, metal corsets, and steel underwear (figure 13). Her art pieces are enhanced by her

conscious use of unusual mediums, such as latex, organza, and henna paste. This change suggests increased conflict between her work's demands imposed by cultural norms and the resistance of the human body. The clothing-inspired works by Naiza enable a more direct investigation of the body and the complicated relationships it experiences in both the personal and political spheres.

They are used to develop several personae or personas. Naiza planned to establish her own army as a solution to the Red Mosque (*Lal Masjid*) problem in Islamabad. Her artistic practice navigates the complicated issues surrounding the feminine form while also addressing societal norms and individual agency. Her investigation of the sources and themes gives an interesting and multifaceted viewpoint on current problems. "Heavenly Ornaments" (figure 14), a piece of metal art by Naiza, is a noteworthy example of her work. These metal-sculpted body decorations have a rich symbolic significance. Iftikhar Dadi, an art historian, quotes Naiza's assertion and discusses her creative output. He claims that she studied the *Bihishti Zewar*, a book written by *Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi* in early 20th-century India, in depth and that she made her metal components, such as corsets, chastity belts, and body armor.



(Figure 13) Naiza H Khan, Armour Lingerie, Alloy.

Image courtesy Eli & Edythe Broad Museum of Art

<https://blog.saffronart.com/2013/02/27/karachi-elegies/>





(Figure 14) Naiza H Khan, Heavenly Ornaments

Image courtesy Eli & Edythe Broad Museum of Art

In her artwork, Naiza Khan examines the feminine body's sensuality as well as its "heaviness, opacity, and resistance to social structure." The deliberate use of unconventional mediums by Naiza, such as latex, organza, and henna paste, demonstrates her exploration of various materials as symbols. Her recent turn to hard, tenacious metal tools, including provocative clothing like chastity belts and corsets, reveals a growing tension between societal expectations and the capacity of the human body.

The use of metal contrasts the feminine body's elasticity and complexity with the rigid structures and limitations that society imposes. Naiza's desire to defy and subvert cultural norms is demonstrated by her proposal to establish her own army in response to the social phenomenon of women acting boldly and assertively while donning hijabs.

### **Noor Ali**

The most recent generation of artists is having trouble developing their unique artistic voices. As a result, artists frequently start by choosing a subject that connects with their individual experiences and then fusing it with the appropriate visual style. Born into a dysfunctional family, Noor Ali has focused most of his artistic output on the idea of absence, specifically the lack of home, family, and personal space. He has a strong emotional connection to this topic because of his own childhood. Noor's dread of being uprooted increased when he moved from Karachi to Lahore for his studies, which heightened his need for a sense of identity. He was fascinated by the use of brick in the colonial buildings of Lahore and took inspiration from it.





(Figure 15) Noor Ali, Boundaries, bricks, cement, water color

<http://ismailimail.blog/2016/12/10/pakistani-ismaili-artist-noor-ali-chagani-to-present-at-victoria-and-albert-museum-london-december-14-2016-hold-first-solo-exhibition-in-new-york/>

A small picture that shows a stack of bricks is seen (figure 15). Noor came to understand that a single brick could capture the core of his idea, serving as a suitable metaphor for his creative expression. In his later works, tiny bricks are painstakingly placed to create model-like walls. In his piece "Possession" (figure 16), Noor depicts a brick wall that is enclosed in a frame, turning a commonplace building into a tiny picture that adorns a wall.



(Figure 16) Noor Ali, Possession, bricks, cement, water color

Courtesy of Devi Art foundation

<https://universes.art/en/nafas/articles/2010/resemble-reassemble/images/12-noor-ali-chagani>

Noor Ali's work has evolved into an experience sculpture with an unusual form that is based on a personal notion. In order to re-establish a connection with the setting that gave birth to Noor's initial vision, the artwork is installed outside of a gallery in a residential area. The absence of home, family, and personal space is Noor's chosen theme, and it is closely related to his own experiences. By symbolically representing his theme with little bricks, he successfully combines this idea with an artistic aesthetic. It is clear that Noor has a strong affinity for using bricks in her artwork since she is drawn to brick structures. Noor Ali's recurrent theme, which reflects her life and upbringing in a family, profoundly connects with her experiences. By constructing layers, making voids, or making sculptures, her distinctive method for employing bricks in her artwork communicates this sense of absence. Ali expresses her outlook on life and asks the audience to connect with it beyond simple aesthetic appreciation by displaying her artwork in locations other than conventional galleries.

### **Ali Baba**

At the National College of Arts, Lahore, Ali Baba was trained as a painter, but after completing his thesis project, his artistic interest switched to sculpture. The investigation of the human body and its interaction with the environment is at the heart of his work (figure 17). He explores the interaction between positive and negative areas through the use of tactile sensations in his sculptures. Ali's goal as an artist is to use silent, subdued, and sensitive imagery to deeply affect viewers on an emotional level.



(Figure 17) Ali Baba, Untitled, Feather

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CwQXx9GryHc/?ishid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA>



(Figure 18) Ali Baba, Untitled II, Glass.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CtoZro4rqbl/?ishid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA> ==

While incorporating abstract forms and experimenting with different media, Ali Baba keeps the surreal aspects of his work present. This makes his artistic ability more sophisticated. His most recent works show a change in direction, moving toward abstraction and simpler forms. Simple shapes are paired with presence-inspiring impressions to produce a befuddling effect while ensuring flawless execution (figure 18). Ali keeps investigating the relationship between forms and space throughout his career, but his work gradually shifts from figurative and representational to minimalistic and abstract expressions that demonstrate his growth as an artist.

### **Maryam Tahir**

Maryam Tahir is a sculptor who uses multiples of a single module or repetitive, time-consuming methods to produce non-objective forms. Her art explores the concepts of complexity, quantity, and repetition, changing how things look visually. She creates an unrecognizable and increasingly alluring semi-organic form by using several common pins to embed them into a sheet of carpet underlay. Since Maryam's art is nameless, the audience can approach it without having any preconceived notions about how to look at or perceive it. As the visitor approaches the sculpture, which was initially an intriguing mass, it starts to seem to move. A sheet of carpet underlay serves as the canvas for the artist's creation as she deftly inserts pins into it in patterns and forms. The sculpture's (figure 19) confusing form blurs the distinction between natural and artificial components and invites visitors to give it their own unique interpretation. With their steel heads catching light and casting enthralling shadows and highlights, the sheer number of pins employed is simply astounding. The tones of the carpet underlay are contrasted with the pins' organic metallic luster. The sculptures get more abstract and unrecognizable as the visitor approaches them.



(Figure 19) Maryam Tahir, Untitled, Common Pins and Carpet Underlay sheet  
 Courtesy: University College of Art & Design Research Center PU's library



(Figure 20) Maryam Tahir, Masking Tape, 2012  
<http://vaslart.org/maryam-tahir/>

In her art, she frequently uses sculptures to express her emotions and experiences. She accomplishes this through a laborious and demanding creative process. Her artwork undergoes changes in both shape and content that reflect her personal emotions. Maryam presents her works in a visually engaging way that defies the viewers' typical ways of perceiving things by utilizing uncommon materials and techniques.

### **Amin Gulgee:**

Amin Gulgee is a Karachi-based, renowned sculptor who received his degree from Yale University and returned to Pakistan in 1989. Since then, he has been experimenting with Islamic elements like calligraphy, geometry, and landscape philosophy to incorporate into his bronze and copper sculptures. Kufic script and *Chahar-bagh* are recurrent themes that create a dialogue between contemporary thought and Islamic identity.

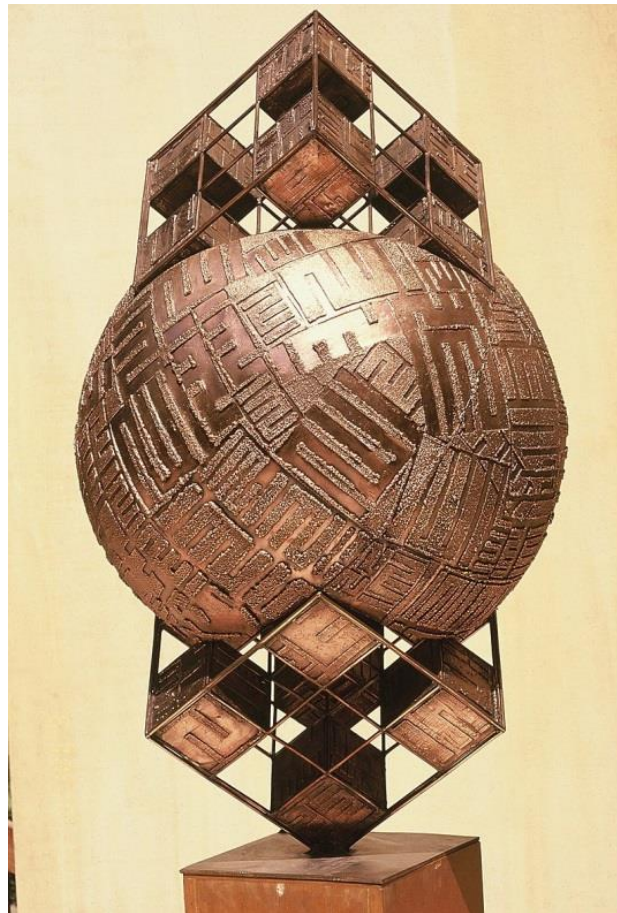


Figure 21: Amin Gulgee, Balance, Bronsze, 2003

<https://www.gulgeeamin.com/>

He adopts a fluid way of creating in which there is no fixed plan and the material communicates with the artist towards the form, which is more aligned with the underlying philosophy. As in figure 21, a bronze sculpture titled Balance not only creates a symmetric form adorned with the word 'Allah' in square Kufic script but also expresses the sculptor's perspective about the role of divine presence in the larger scheme of events. His expression is innovative and experimental, but the idea is connected to a more historic tradition of religion and devotion.



## Analysis

Susanne Katherina Langer was an American philosopher of art, a writer, and an educator. In her book 'Philosophy in a New Key,' she developed a rigorous, methodical philosophical theory that attempted to explain artistic expression and connect it to other mental activities. She created a theory called "presentational symbolism," which postulated that humans used symbols like music, art, and myth-making to deal with occurrences that were challenging to explain in everyday language. Langer made a distinction between "non-discursive" symbols used in art and other forms of human expression and "discursive" symbols used in science and everyday language. She made an effort to show that, like verbal phrases, the "iconic symbols" of human emotion utilized in creative expression could be understood in terms of conventions and semantic rules. She argued that these symbols signified more than just the individual artist's expression of emotion and might help both the artist and his audience feel emotions they had never felt before.

Shahid Sajjad is considered among the earlier generations of sculptors in Pakistan. In his work, the objects are reduced to their basic forms. The expression of an underlying emotion seems to overtake a concern to achieve a formal similarity. It is in accordance with the modern aesthetics that he inspired during his journeys to the West and Far East. But as we trace the work of Khalil Chistee and Jamil Baloch, there seems to be a desire to portray non-figurative art, but in a much more subdued way. The Game of Seduction (figure 7) has not only physical connotations in its title but also the form of chairs, which have skillful references to the human body. Similarly, in Cry II (figure 8) by Jamil Baloch, the female body almost loses all its identifying attributes, and the veil covers everything from the body up to the emotions. The experimentation with the medium and distortive reduction of form communicates with interpersonal unrest and social oppression. Humaira Abid has used representational symbolism in a different way. She has replaced the human body with the objects of vernacular life. The conflict between the visual form and physical attributes of the material creates a dialogue about the role of women in Pakistani society. The absence of figures effectively makes a bold comment on the underrepresentation of females in various walks of life. Naiza Khan has literally subtracted the female form, but still, the presence of the female is more obvious than anything. Although her work cannot be classified as non-figurative, on conceptual grounds, it truly represents the social factors that have driven artists to choose non-figurative representation. In the case of Ali Baba and Maryam Tahir, it seems like more material exploration takes the artist sometimes closer to the human form and sometimes away from that. There is the presence as well as the absence of the human body in Ali Baba, which talks about remnants of memory, emotional connectivity, and the desire to seek what has been lost. There is a kind of poetic rendition of absence in his work that aligns with more subjective ideas. Compared to that, Amin Gulgee is very expressive and proud of the past, which is revered in his work. He is loud in expression and solid in presence, and the language he derives from his transnational experiences creates a language in bronze that is local yet has a historical depth to it.

In 1998, Akbar Naqvi contributed a book titled "Image and Identity," which is considered a reference in the field of Pakistani art history. In his book, Naqvi examines Pakistan's artistic development from the time of its independence until 1997. He highlights Pakistani art as a unique aspect of the Muslim heritage of the region. Notably, Naqvi illuminates how contemporary Pakistani artists, influenced by the traditions of the region, integrate cubism and abstraction to produce unique expressions that speak to our cultural identity.

## Conclusion

For any creative expression, there is a complex process of decision-making. The subtle choices of form, scale, finishes, and placement all depend upon the subconscious response of the artist to their surroundings. These responses are modulated by skills, aspirations, personal choices, and many other social factors. Pakistan, being a new state with an Islamic ideology, had very intertwined factors of ideology, social realities, and power politics, among which were the optimism and responsive attitude of



the practicing artists. Although the nation faced times of dictatorship and far-right politics, the artists, especially sculptors, continued to respond in effective ways.

Prohibition of figurative representation in Muslim religion is a sole factor in the adoption of non-figurative practices among sculptors in Pakistan. In spite of looking back into the Harappan or Gandhara past, many artists chose to develop visual language relevant to current global practices. There had been many thematic choices and formal concerns related to the medium, which resulted in deviations from the formal representation of the human body. Even the overtly feminist works have a language that speaks in regional tones of expression. In a broader perspective, there is an urge to explore a local vocabulary of sculptural expression.

It is concluded that the sculptors of Pakistan created non-figurative sculptural art among figurative representation through their innovative ideas and variety of techniques. The work of Anjum Ayaz features an abstract representation of domestic abuse in an artistic way. Khalil Chishtee's experimental work shows spatial dimensions. In his work, his experiences are reflected by using unusual materials like plastic bags. The disposable character of the waste bags shows the fragility of the relationship. The art works of Humaira Abid represent her inspiration with clichéd views, attitudes, relationships, agony, and pleasure through wooden *takhti*. Several layers of meaning, comedy, and irony reflect from side to side in her work. Ali Baba explores collaboration between positive and negative spaces through the use of concrete sensations in his sculptures. The imagery deeply affects the viewers on an emotional level. Mariam Tahirs sculptures express her emotions with the use of different materials. Masking tape and common pins on sheets are the most common ways to express her feelings towards her themes. On the other hand, Amin Gulgee is a versatile sculptor who expresses her feelings through a variety of materials. The contemporary modern sculptors of Pakistan express their feelings and emotions through non-figurative art by using a variety of materials in innovative ways.

## Acknowledgements

None.

## Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest.

## Funding Source

The authors received NO funding to conduct this study.

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