COVER PAGE: "AalamKhanna" by Amra Khan is a word map evolving from the word 'Khan'. This map was made during the process of this project for research purposes to tap into the artists associations with this title which refers to a cultural identity while being a part of it. In other words, what does a 'Khan' think of 'Khan'.

My Name is ..... 

Curated by
Hajra Haider
Dedicated to
the human minority of this world.
The philosophical meaning of ‘Identity’ is ‘anything that makes an entity definable and recognizable. This definition and recognition is based on epistemology which human beings use to categorize everything, usually people in order to make sense of the world and extrapolate information, hence the formation of collective and cultural identities which often turn into stereotypes.

Stereotypes are rigid oversimplified generalizations about groups of people, meanwhile ignoring any complex characteristics. Thus reducing and limiting individual identity by portraying a set image and thus dictating how a certain group and the individuals within that group should be read. Stereotypes can be positive and negative, though both are harmful due to its mere nature. It is important to break these stereotypes in order to create a new set of values and forming new identities, as it is an ongoing process which should evolve as definitions, politics of location and other structures of society evolve.

*Khan* is a title which was originally Mongol and subsequently Central Asian title for a sovereign or military ruler. It has transcended to the rest of the world and Asia through the Mongol invasion. This title held a certain authority as it signified power due to its origin. The Pashtuns in the former Afghan territories of the current North West Frontier Province of Pakistan also adopted this title, and have formed a cultural identity through it which has formed certain stereotypes in the process.

The Khans belong to every strata of society, as well as found in all professions and are widespread all over Pakistan, not necessarily belonging to a Pashtun descent. This project enquires about the representation of individual identity in the presence of a cultural identity which is predominant over all other collective identities that a person belongs to. In turn it also questions the affects or interference of the politics of location on the language and practice of an artist in his representation of self.

“*Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always ‘knowing’ (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation always constructed across a ‘lack’, across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical - to the subject processes which are invested in them.*” (Stuart Hall 1995)

-Hajra Haider Karrar
There is a certain inescapable theatricality about stereotyped identities, and one invariably returns to the humor of the stage when contemplating upon identity and the reductivism out of which stock characters are born. The notion of the stock character is precisely the creation of a character type; fixed attributes that represent an unchanging race, culture or social type. Commedia Dell Arte’s Harlequin, Arlecchino, Pierrot and Pedrolino are the earliest known stock characters of the theatrical world, and in most instances, the characters themselves are often referred to as ‘masks’ that are arguably inseparable from the character itself. This only reminds us time and again, how much art imitates life itself, for our cultures are rife with Arlecchinos and Pierrots of our own, and their masks are the stereotypes they bear.

To return to the roots of the word stereotype, a kind of plate used to produce exact duplicate prints of a font or image, entails dealing with the notion of an unchanging and fixed set of characteristics. This lack of change is what initiates the firm and solid impression of something, a perception that doesn’t change, a process to which all humans fall prey. The stereotype is Arlecchino’s mask that becomes synonymous with his character. What then, entails an unmasking of an Arlecchino, a stock representation of a cultural identity? For starters, one cannot approach this subject without addressing the politics of subjectification. A recent exhibition at the IVS gallery titled ‘My Name Is...’ explored this very question with particular emphasis on the perceived image of the patrilineal name Khan. To someone who studies family names as a subject, this transformation of Khan as a title, into a family name and then a culturally constructed stock character, presents a linguistic genealogy shaped by an evolving socio-cultural narrative, but the exhibition presents an alternative view from six artists who are Khans themselves.

There is an entire process nestled within the time that the word Khan was first used as an honorific title by the Mongols and its usage now, as more than just patrilineal family name, but a stock character, almost as cinematized as the commedia dell-arte. An entity called Khan sahib, who we love, question, ridicule, chastise and adore all at the same time, Khan, in all its stereotyped glory, is elusive, and whether we admit it or not, is at some level, a reflection of our own multifaceted characters. The Khan lives in all of us. Our perceptions of others expose who we are and how we think. Khan, therefore, becomes the subject of the exhibition, and attempts to demonstrate how a socio-cultural linguistic process actually comes to produces subjectivities. Khan, then, is no longer a patrilineal name; it is the producer of manifold subjectivities.

Intended by its curator, Hajra Haider Karrar, to debunk the racial stereotypes associated with Khan, the show evokes a dialogue between the notion of the Self and the Other, and their interchangeability. From Karrar’s standpoint, the show must allow for Khan to retain an ambiguous potentiality, that is both the subject of, and subjected to cultural discourse and projection. In addition to questioning this subjectification of the name Khan, and its being reduced down to an almost unchanging stock character of society, the exhibition exposes the fact that control is not always the dominant element in the process of subjectification. Where stereotypes are concerned, identity is an image of the Self, created by
the other, and yet this exhibition opens up an intriguing view of this identity as subjected to the views of artists who are themselves Khans. The image of the self is therefore very much a process of this subjectification.

The collection of works presented by the artists open up manifold meanings of what it means to be subject: where one artist reveals an observational stance, a spectator viewing the subject as a topic of discussion and negotiation, another takes up the meaning of identity as subject to a kind of vulnerability, liability or weakness; in some instances, this figures as identity being subject to society’s perceptual maladies. In other works, identity is subjected by something else, perhaps a dominant force, in some cases subjected by its own stereotype, the image of the Self seen through the eyes of the Other. For the curator, this is what was perhaps intended, to allow the artists to open up the unlimited possibilities of interpreting the subject, Khan becomes the subject of this exhibition in myriad shape-shifting connotations, and the notion of identity therefore, becomes problematized.

-Saadia M. Mirza

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‘What’s in a name?’ asks a particularly infatuated heroine out of Shakespeare. A lot, apparently. Names are not just letters strung together mellifluously for identifying and addressing someone, they are nuclei of genealogical baggage and cultural connotations. When a baby is named, he has no idea that he is being tattooed, tagged and tied up with expectations; he has no idea that his naming ceremony is actually the installation of a kind of sensor in him – to be conveniently activated a number of times as he grows up. What activates that sensor can be an emotionally charged plea for good behaviour for the sake of his name ('You’re a Syed, act like one!') or humour targeting his name (we have all heard the Pathan jokes) or the instant solidarity he may feel with someone else carrying the same name as his.

Names are live entities. They are perhaps the only lifelong companions we have. We would panic if our names were taken from us, in much the same way as Peter Pan does when his shadow escapes him or John Proctor from Arthur Miller’s Crucible does when he is being forced to relinquish his name to a document of condemnation. ‘Because it is my name!’ he cries. ‘Because I cannot have another in my life! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!’ Dramatic, yes. But Miller was not exaggerating the intense and vital connection one feels with one’s name. Names are inextricably linked with identities and identities, once they take root, start being informed by a range of associations and suppositions.

This is how stereotypes pertaining to identity are formed, and a unique group show conceived and curated by Hajra Haider Karrar challenges one such stereotype. The ingenious ‘My Name Is...’ brings together works by six artists who have the surname Khan in common. Historically, the Mongols are credited with the earliest use of the name Khan, but its integration in South Asian territories was a result of its adoption by the Afghans, Turks and Mughals who had settled here. Most of us have a number of Khans among our friends and acquaintances. We probably think of them as a fair-skinned, friendly bunch with a few odd angles sticking out. And we may, on occasion, all too easily fall into the trap of stereotyping them because of their generalized Pashtun descents. But this exhibition sets out to prove that there is, indeed, much more to them than meets the abruptly assuming eye.

Perhaps the first blow dealt to any potential stereotypical evaluation in this case is the remarkable heterogeneity of the works. Of the six participating artists, five are women – and let me tell you, they do not believe in beating about the bush. The individual or social concerns they have are not minced, tucked or cherry-topped. With honesty, wit and liberal helpings of the macabre, these artists comment on gender-bias, the fickleness of the canonical idea of beauty, common hypocritical perceptions of marriage and sexuality and a variety of other themes most artists would steer clear of. Their use of media is as unexpected and gritty as their confrontations with these grimmer aspects of life.

Sara Khan’s mixed media drawings take primetime commercial material – familiar, familial moments – and present them in a completely unpretentious, completely unnerving way. Some of her characters may be seated comfortably and indulgently around a pet but their faces will be jeering; some will seem
to be visibly enjoying a television show but the image on screen will be jarringly violent (and shakily drawn airplanes and missiles will be swarming outside the living room window); one of them, in front of the drawn backdrop of a snug, traditional interior, will be good-naturedly reaching out to pet what looks suspiciously like the hound of the Baskervilles. You get the gist. Nothing is what it seems in Sara Khan’s charcoal-and-ink world of lazy, summer afternoons punctuated with a yelp or two.

Maria Khan is an exceptional draftswoman with a penchant for the grotesque. She presents her characters – large and fleshy women sporting unabashed expressions – with almost brutal candour. Decked out in frills and pretty bows, roses on their bosoms, these women connive and snicker and chatter, blissfully unaware (or pretending to be), of the rigid criterion of beauty with which they can be judged. Their apparent ease with themselves, emphasized by the confidence and fluidity of Maria’s lines, gives the work an in-your-face kind of quality. Social paradigms involving age, gender and image are all confronted and playfully mocked.

Saba Khan is another artist who, with her work for ‘My Name Is…’ questions the carefully constructed expectations that define the lives and roles of women in our society. She uses a favourite and recurrent motif of hers – the teapot and teacups – to remark on the superficial daintiness that is a prerequisite for acceptance and approval in social circles. A saccharine pink dominates the prim table and tray arrangements, here and there half-devoured by a lace doily. With a range of oddly suited mediums that become surprisingly compatible in her hands, she layers her work with erased, eroded surfaces at the heart of which there is always an eerily judgmental tea-set.

And if you think these artists’ works constitute enough of a critique of social norm, you have yet to face Amra Khan’s dissoluble and dissolute stain-silhouettes. Her blots and dabs are metaphors for those disruptive emotions, urges and ideas which actually give us a shape and definition but which we are forever at pains to contain within strait-laced outlines. Her crowning piece for this show is a large painting titled ‘Conjugal Burns’. A terribly beautiful reworking of Klimt’s ‘Judith II’, the painting features a towering, androgynous Judith rising from a blood-red pool of chicken-heads, the bearded and mustachioed head of Holofernes looking blearily through it. Patriarchy and convention are dismantled by this emaciated, swollen-lipped protagonist.

With a different brand of satire, Sara Khan Pathan tackles the contradictions inherent in all stereotypes. Her mixed media works set out to prove, in a good-humoured vein, how ludicrous it is to view the world through bias-tinted glasses. She takes some of the most famous and accomplished Khans from Pakistan’s history, photographed receiving accolades or at the height of their glory, and paints walnuts over their heads, thus commenting on the stereotypical and baseless linking of Khans (in particular, Pathans) with dim-wittedness. Hers are powerful pieces that, without coming off as didactic, make you realize how ugly the tendency to generalize can really be.

Muhammad Atif Khan’s digital prints approach ideas of identity and culture more poetically. Using symbols from Mughal miniature paintings and Pathan truck art, he weaves colourful narratives that are at once whimsical and wistful. His choice of character is a restive, inquisitive Mughal king who can be seen as an embodiment of our incessantly changing, undulating, absorbing and emitting land. In this
The body of work by the artist, he can be seen contemplating a flock of birds flying across the sky, a gun poised over his shoulder. The traditionally stylized storm clouds above the birds also partially reveal an airplane. The prints are animated with the movement of the birds, clouds and plane – symbolizing migratory patterns and all being taken in by the tiny, static figure of the king below. Atif Khan brings attention to the idea that Pathans, compared to other races, are more open to the possibility of migrating from one place to another in search of better livelihood.

Through the works of these six artists, ‘My Name Is...’ celebrates individuality and the ability to be different. Acquiescent and defiant by turns, it presents us with a way of taking pride in our names and our respective histories as well as being imaginative enough to squirm out of the stereotype-casings these things come with.

-Dua Abbas Rizvi

*Dua Abbas Rizvi is a visual artist and writer based in Lahore, Pakistan. She is a Fine Art Graduate from the National College of Arts.*
My Name Is .....
MUHAMMAD ATIF KHAN, (born 1972, Pakistan), graduated (with distinction) in 1997 in Fine Art from the National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan and in 1998 was awarded the UNESCO-ASHBURG Bursary, completing a residency at Darat-al-Funun in Amman, Jordan. He received Commonwealth Arts & Crafts Award in 2007. He was also appointed artist in residence at the Swansea Print Workshop in Wales, London Print Studio in England and Glasgow Print Studio in Scotland, during the years 2005 to 2008.

He has also participated in art workshops in India, Bangladesh and Jordan. He has exhibited throughout Asia, North America, Europe, and Africa. In 2012, he has participated at ‘India Art Fair’ in New Delhi, ‘Art HK 12’ in Hong Kong, ‘Contemporary Istanbul’ in Turkey and ‘Scope Miami’ in USA. This year he is exhibiting his works in solo shows in UK and Switzerland. He is also participating in ‘Art Basel Hong Kong’ and ‘Scope Basel’ in Switzerland. Alongside his artistic practice, Khan is the faculty member at the prestigious National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan.

Artist Statement
My work is inspired by the great tradition of storytelling. Its poetic symbolism can be clearly observed in my work. One can find recognizable objects and symbols in them, which denote obvious meanings. These can lead the viewer to find hidden messages. Images of diverse and contrasting environments are juxtaposed in one space, subverting their original contextual meaning and suggesting new messages. My work has a decorative quality, which is also a significant element of our traditional arts. I observe that nature is always beautiful even at its most ferocious moments. Therefore I try to present my harsh political or social comments in a decorative way which balances the bitterness of the subject matter.

About the works, included in the exhibition ‘Khans’:
First of all, I admit that I never tried to relate my art work with my family history, before. I was completely unaware of a very strong connection between my art practice and my family history but the show ‘Khans’ (thanks to the curator Hajra Haider) provided me an opportunity to look at my own work, keeping in mind that I belong to a specific clan of Pathans. I am surprised to see that even many centuries have been passed, the language has been transformed, the geographical realities has been changed, the pakhton culture has been amalgamated with local ones but my art work demonstrates a very strong connection with my roots, even I was not consciously doing efforts to make that bond. It is a fact that living things inherit traits from their parents but I am shocked that it also applies to the arts and aesthetics, as well.
My aesthetical sensibility, narrative style, way of composing elements and even choices of subject matters are very close to the arts and crafts (e.g. pathan’s truck art, carpet making etc.) of the Pashtun areas in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Aesthetically, my work is inspired by two main forms of art:

- The high form of subcontinent’s art; Miniature painting
- The popular form of Pakistani street art; Truck art

In order to state my feelings through visual narrative, I simultaneously incorporate elements from miniature paintings and pathan truck paintings in my work. By and large, I manipulate them, I recompose them, I change their time and space and I change their original contextual meaning to get the required results. In the works, I created for the show ‘Khans’, I tried to focus on the phenomenon of migration in context of my personal experiences. Unlike some other races, pathans always opt for migration from one place to another in search of better opportunities for life.

Word Map:
KHAN - Straight forward – Brave - Emotional, Diligent, Migrator.

Family Map
Pishin- (Ghauryani) Delhi-Sahiwal-Lahore
Migration I
63.5 x 44.5 cm
Archival digital print on Hahnemühle paper
2013

Migration II
63.5 x 44.5 cm
Archival digital print on Hahnemühle paper
2013

She is currently teaches at National College of Arts as an Assistant Professor and lives in Lahore, Pakistan.

Artist’s Statement:

My art practice has been about observations of my own urban environment of Lahore. It has reflected upon the changing fabric and growing discrepancies between the economic classes. Satirical tools and humor are used to highlight more serious issues. A sense of play is present in the works where use of materials and colours also give an effect of urban kitsch.

Works in the exhibition are about gender stereotypes; by using typical household upper middle/elite class objects and bubblegum pink, I reflect upon the role that is expected of the female in our society. Doilies are used to encase the overall composition and create a sense of claustrophobia.

Word Map:

KHAN - Akhrot, Khar damagh, Khocha, Gora Rang, Good looks

Location Map:

Kaniguram, South Waziristan → Jalandhar, India → Lahore, Pakistan.
**Bubble Gum Tea Party,**
51 x 76 cm
Acrylic, graphite and glass beads on Canson paper,
2013

**Pink Doily,**
18 x 23cm
Acrylic and digital transfer on Hahnemuhle paper,
2013.
The Silverware,
51 x 76 cm,
Acrylic, graphite, glass beads and carbon drawing on Strathmore paper,
2013.

Porcelain Dreaming,
51 x 76 cm,
Acrylic and carbon drawing on Canson paper,
2013.
SARA KHAN b. 1984 UK.
After graduating I found myself a studio and started working. I struggled without the constant guidance of advisors at first but ended up learning a lot from my first solo show at the Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore arts council, May 2010. My second solo show took place at the Rohtas Art Gallery, Islamabad, December 2010. Four years out of college and I was more sure of what I was doing- my third show took place at the Canvas Art Gallery, Karachi, March 2012, with a completely new body of work. My latest work is an extension of this work- I've continued to observe people and told stories through a collaboration of mediums. I've added complexity to the stories through more characters, their relationship with each other and a further layering of the mediums. In May 2012 I got a chance to go to Bergen, Norway for a 2 week international art residency at, it was an incredibly refreshing experience.

Artist Statement:

The fluidity of ink, its flow and the unpredictability of how it finally settles is very exciting. Charcoal, too, is extremely flexible; it's a rich expressive medium and is effective for creating high contrast and drama. Scratching a surface on the other hand is not tractable at all: it is irreversible and severe. To put polar opposite mediums side by side or on top of each other and make them come together well is a challenge I quite enjoy. That is how I want the characters in my work to come across too, plain yet quirky, confident yet insecure. I wish to amalgamate the madness with the sanity, my dreams with my perception of reality into a single everyday scenario.

Word Map:
KHAN – Jazba - Rage - Pride - Funny - Big

Family Map:
Anatolia-Afghanistan-South Waziristan-Jalandar-Lahore
Afternoons,
74 x 54 cm,
Mixed Medium,
2013

Plaything,
32 x 53 cm,
Mixed Medium,
2013
Playtime,
54 x 74 cm,
Mixed Medium
2013

GT,
74 x 55 cm,
Mixed media,
2013
Living Room, 
54 x 30 cm, 
Mixed medium, 
2013

Freefall, 
33 x 53 cm, 
Mixed Medium 
2013
Maria Khan  b. 1986, live and works in Lahore, Pakistan

She did her M.A (HONS) in Visual Arts from National College of Arts, Lahore, with a distinction in studio practice, 2011. She was given the best young artist award by the Punjab Arts Council in 2010 and 2012. She has exhibited her work in various group shows in Pakistan.

Artist Statement
My work revolves around deformity — showcasing larger-than-life, monstrous characters, big-bosomed mature women who sit comfortably in their corpulent flesh and fancy clothes, every smile showing off a beautifully crooked set of teeth. A childlike ribbon, in fancy clothes...something is delightfully wrong about them.

The work is about a woman’s inner nature and visualizing the more disturbing aspects of the self, which are normally kept locked in our heads away from public scrutiny.

I see my work as intensely personal and influenced by my immediate surroundings. I believe we all have stories and secrets that we want to share and art is my medium to share those stories with the world.

Word Map
KHAN – Pathan – Grandfather – Afghanistan – Innocent - Stupid
Untitled
84 x 122 cm
Conte and Acrylic on bitumen paper
2013

Untitled
76 x 127 cm
Conte and Acrylic on bitumen paper
2013
AMRA KHAN born in Islamabad Pakistan lives and works in Lahore. She graduated from National College of Arts Lahore with a distinction in painting in 2008. She did her masters in visual arts from National College of arts Lahore, with a semester in École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSBA) Paris, France from 2010-2011. She is skilled in oils, acrylics and miniature painting and often expresses her talents through sculptures and video installations. Her work tends to work around having two poles and different ideas or personalities living in the same body, Conflicting gender, power and identity. She works to speak through and incite the observer to question tangibility. She has exhibited her works in galleries across Pakistan such as Canvas art gallery and Koel art gallery, Karachi, and at other spaces such as Alhamra Art Gallery, Zahoor-ul-Akhaq Gallery National College of Arts, Rohtas 2 and Nairang Gallery in Lahore; Satrung Gallery and Rohtas Gallery Islamabad and the Karachi Arts Council in Karachi. She did her first solo show “Gender Nectar” “Nectar des Sexes”, at Galerie Sauvaget, Paris, France and has also shown her work at Gallery Gauche, École Nationale Supérieure des beaux-arts Paris, France.

Artist Statement
The conflict is always within the mind, within the body and the only thing keeping control and holding it all together is the outline, the outer skin, the persona, the character we stage for others. Controlling all those unexpressed, unspoken, emotions, desires, thoughts, ideas and strokes bottled up inside. If only life can be accepted with all its stains, dabs and spills, for they hold more emotion than the plain white surface.

Word Map
KHAN - Bold – Courage – Difficult - Basti - Inspirational
Conjugal Burns
244 x 91 cm
Oil, Acrylic, Gold dust on Canvas,
2013

Plugur,
51 x 76 cm
Ink, tea, coffee on Paper
2010
Blubber Lady,
35.5 x 46 cm,
Ink, tea, coffee on Paper
2010

Poker face,
51 x 61 cm,
Ink, tea, coffee on Paper
2010
SARA KHAN PATHAN, a Fine Art graduate and a distinction holder from the University of Karachi, disciplined in painting has over the years become a thriving artist not only working in mixed media but has given the field of miniature a whole new perspective by initiating the concept of ‘miniature sculpture’.

Her artwork is mainly an amalgamation of self-portraits, fusing text and unambiguousness of walnut shells, plastic toys and vice versa; beautifying the rage rather than creating a revolting affect, depicting through satire the commonality of social aggression that is prevalent in an uneven progression. She has been exhibiting a number of successful shows nationally and has been show cased abroad as well. Khan lives and works in Karachi and has been teaching painting in Karachi University’ Visual studies department.

Artist Statement
My work generates satire; humor and mock actions that have affecting reactions, by creating a commentary on social, political or individual responses. Experimentation becomes entertainment as challenging ideas become comfort of expression. When visuals emerge as demonstrations occurring within, I am induced to reveal my ideas.

Word Map
KHAN – Brilliant – Hardcore – Legacy – Leader-- Glory

Family Map
Jalalabad – Hyderabad Deccan- Karachi
Imran Khan
11 x 14 cm
Gouache and watercolor on Archival print
2013

Ayub Khan
7.6 x 8 cm
Gouache and watercolor on Archival print
2013
Jansheer Khan
7.6 x 11 cm
Gouache and watercolor on Archival print
2013

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan
13 x 16 cm
Gouache and watercolor on Archival print
2013
Amir Khan
7.5 x 8 cm
Gouache and watercolor on Archival print.
2013
A special thanks to all the artists for believing in this project and being an integral part of it and the contributors to this catalogue, without whose input this project would have been incomplete; Atif Khan, Saba Khan, Sara Khan, Amra Khan, Maria Khan, Sara Khan Pathan, Dua Abbas and Sadia Mirza.