Truck and Billboard Art: The study of ways they are influencing communication design in Pakistan

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“If at all, how is local art influencing the design sensibility in Pakistan?”
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Abstract

Through the course of my university education, I have noticed that every county takes inspiration from its own culture and traditions. These observations lead me to peer into my own country’s design, the field of advertising in particular and formulated the question, “If at all, how is local art influencing design sensibility in Pakistan?” Truck/Bus art and Billboard art were the two major forms of local art I focused on during the course of my research. I read up thoroughly on this topic on various media, first consulting books regarding the history of the art forms themselves. I also browsed through articles in newspapers, magazines, websites and online journals concerning the promotion of these art forms as well as design itself and how it adapts to the needs of the masses etc.

Subsequently, I outlined my research methodology i.e. how I planned to conduct my primary research. I realized that a qualitative approach would be most adequate. After choosing my prospective interviewees based on their professions, and relevance to my topic, I conducted my interviews and transcribed them. At the analysis stage, facts from my literature review as well as information from my primary research, all came together in the form of a discussion, where I also gave examples of various ad campaigns or product packaging I had studied.

As a conclusion, I have been lead to believe that local art does indeed have a lot of influence on our country’s design aesthetics, since it does appeal to our masses. It has been incorporated into design in superficial ways as well as with deep rooted concepts.
The only way we can truly complete this amalgamation is to thoroughly study the art itself as well as our customs. It is not simply a matter of design but the ownership of our culture and its celebration to further create a unique design sensibility true to our country.
Introduction

Trucks and buses are such a strong part of our visual culture. The monotony of the bare buildings is a mere backdrop for the noisy and congested traffic, but these trucks, with their bright colors and electrifying designs, really capture one’s attention. Lollywood billboards come under the same category per say. They attract equal or more attention than trucks due to the vulgar subject matter as well as the dynamic compositions and garish colors.

It is a known fact that the repetitive viewing of certain imagery or likewise, definitely has an impact on the human brain. It is called cognitive conditioning in the field of psychology. I want to research how the visual language of local art is being incorporated into design. How did it suddenly start to appear on t-shirts, bags and apparel in the mainstream? How did phrases from trucks and buses become popular subjects to be printed on shirts and whatnot? This evolution has always had a subconscious effect on our brains, since it is such a large part of our visual culture that can’t possibly go unnoticed.

Hence, I want to explore if at all, how a form of local art influences communication design in our country. There are several types of local arts in Pakistan but for the sake of concise and focused research, I have chosen vehicle and billboard art. As far as communication design is concerned, there are again several categories that fall under it but I shall be focusing on advertising i.e. TVCs, print ads and packaging. Through this exploration, I do not seek exact replication of the truck art motifs or
patterns, nor the same movie characters from the hoardings, but their essence infused into our current design psyche.

I want to know whether the same sensibility is being applied and what their manner of application is in our current advertising, graphics and other fields of communication design. By sensibility, I imply the use of their characteristic bright colors, different interpretation of certain visual codes, influence of the vernacular etc. Our neighboring countries have embraced their cultures and explored them visually and aesthetically in the field of design. Pakistan also seems to have boarded that train. I am going to explore the extent and nature of this design journey!

The first chapter is a synopsis of all the literature I have gone through, be it in the form of books, websites, articles, magazines, gazettes etc. It includes the information that I have gained through reading all of the texts and is therefore a review of my secondary research.

Next comes the Research Methodology which is basically a layout of how I wish to conduct my research along with reasons for my choice of methods. It bears the names of prospective interviewees, their relevance to my topic and the reasons for selecting them over other personalities. The latter portion of the same chapter is an account of how the interviews were conducted with each of the candidates, the problems I faced, the amount of pertinent information I gained etc.

After having done my research and acquired ample information, an analysis was initiated. This chapter is a complete discussion which brings up pointers from the
literature review, quotations from the interviews conducted, studies of the various ad campaigns etc., all coming together to help in answering the main question, which set off this research in the first place.

The conclusion naturally ends the series of chapters in the form of a summarized review of analysis and findings. All the discussions and investigations that have lead to the end result are summed up in this section.
Literature Review

History:

Vehicle art in Pakistan is a form of adornment that has transcended through time from a mere means of advertisement to a strong part of our culture. It all started in the early 1920s when an American company, General Motors introduced saloon cars as well as trucks. In 1963, it was taken over and renamed as Ghandhara Industries. “Thames” and later, the “Bedford” truck were both from the British company, Vauxhall, exclusively shipped in by Ghandhara. All through the 1930s and 40s, trucks/buses bore single-color coats of protective paint. The only design elements present were a few monochrome stenciled motifs. Typography barely consisted of the name of the freight company, New Muluk, Sitara-o-Hilal and Taj Mahal being the three main ones at the time. It was not until the 1950s that the economic boom aided the freight pioneers to build up fleets of trucks. Hence the Bedford truck by the British company, Vauxhall came in. They eventually became the prime reason for the vehicle art to flourish.

The trucks arrived in Pakistan in parts and were then assembled. The body consists of the flat bed for container loaders, a high body for goods, a low body with standing galley for sand trucks and a cylindrical construction for water or petrol. It is the high body and sand trucks that create best space for decoration (Kazi). The Bedford truck is out of production in the present day but still remains a favorite with drivers who call it “Rocket” with affectionate satire due to its slow speed. A few local companies in smaller towns still unofficially manufacture Bedford trucks as they find a market in continuing popularity (Kazi). Rival transportation and freight companies hired craftsmen to embellish their
buses solely for the purpose of attracting more passengers. Soon enough, this style and technique of painting buses and trucks became immensely widespread. Having continued till date, the roads of Pakistan are dotted with these brightly colored vehicles adored with paintings and slogans.

Vehicle art basically started off some time during the British Raj. Since the British molded a completely different way for the dominant classes to live their lives, importing materials of daily use as well as luxury from England, the local crafts and art was completely dissuaded. This left the artisans unemployed and consequently forced them to look towards other means of making a livelihood. That is when the artists adapted their skills to the urban needs and started painting trucks.

Where the technique of painting trucks started off as a form of folk art simply to attract passengers, it later evolved as it spread all over the country and became more of a national cultural symbol. It transcended the boundaries of the provinces and became a sort of hybrid icon of culture. That’s when it started gaining more popularity as a form of art and became part of the pop culture.

Truck and Bus art in Pakistan fall under the term local art but they have definitely reached much higher levels of recognition and commercialization over a short stretch of time. Miniature souvenirs models of trucks and buses have become the latest rage for foreigners to take home. Both truck and bus art shares similar color schemes and design sensibility but differ as far as subject matter is concerned. Also, truck art is painted onto the vehicle’s body while bus art consists of stickers which are pasted on. Bus art
generally tilts more towards the gaudy flashy side i.e. *Chamak Patti*, since it came into being for the sole purpose of attracting passengers.

Truck art however is a cultural celebration in its own right and a voice of the general masses in a way. A lot of thought and conceptual layouts are hinted in the illustrations painted on the trucks. Often portraits of certain actresses, from Lollywood and Bollywood can be seen on trucks and so can political figures and war heroes. The phrases and maxims on each of these customized buses/trucks carry their own meaning. Although we treat them as humorous strings of words, the artist who actually painted them definitely had some thought process or the other behind it.

Lollywood billboard painting is a form of art that is absolutely unappreciated in Pakistan. Painting techniques similar to those applied on truck art are employed in their execution. The color palettes are also quite alike and so is the typography. However the subject matter obviously changes from movie to movie. Unlike vehicle art however, Lollywood billboards haven’t had any sort of international exposure. Hence their status in local art is definitely a notch lower than truck art since the latter has received so much commercial appeal as well.

Neighboring countries like Iran, Japan and India have such strong identities and design aesthetics whether it’s in the field of fine arts or graphic design. Why is it so that they prosper with their unique styles while we are still struggling? We have such an immense visual vocabulary and everything around us effects our perception, opinion and serves as inspiration.

1 Brightly colored strips of reflection sheet used to adorn buses
Truck/Bus art and billboard art are, hence, no different and have started to serve as inspiration to innumerable fine artists and designers. Shops like Gulabo further promoted this form of art by printing illustrated trucks/buses as well as their slogans on clothes, apparel and accessories. This further abridged the gap between local art and pop culture. Hence, vehicle art reached a whole new level of commercialization. Companies like Tribal Truck Art promote vehicle art all over the world, especially in the west in the form of small truck/models, souvenirs etc. Indeed, these factors have raised its popular art status globally.

Furthermore, The Dawn newspaper revealed the following information on the 1st of October 2009: “A French doctor, who served for three years in the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences’ Intensive Care Unit (ICU), returned home driving a truck art-adorned 1974 Beetle dubbed Foxy Shahzadi to celebrate Pakistan’s artistic and cultural potential; and promote Pak-French friendship” (Sajjad Syed).

*Fig.1*

Dr Vincent Ioos was accompanied in the 10,000km Islamabad-Paris trip by his colleagues from Pims, Dr Haroon Khanas and Salman Rashid (see *Fig.1*). The 25-day
journey, dubbed as the ‘Art on Wheels Tour’ started from Faisal Mosque on October 31 and took the trio to Iran, Turkey, Greece and Italy before ending up in France.

‘We want to highlight the huge cultural potential of Pakistan through indigenous truck art and tell the world that Pakistan is not just about terrorism,’ said Dr Ioos, while proudly showing his cherry red Foxy Shahzadi… The car represents the ethnic heritage of all the four provinces of Pakistan (Sajjad Syed).

As far as billboard art is concerned, over a hundred Urdu and Punjabi films were being released annually in the 70s. Around 900 cinemas and 11 studios were churning out films at the time. Unfortunately the collapse of the flourishing industry was brought about by the advent of video and piracy. Billboard painting also took the toll alongside the downfall of our film industry. The core of billboard painting lies at Royal Park within Laxmi Chowk in Lahore. The whole set of intersecting streets are a sight to behold, each minute space painted and some huge Technicolor superhero armed with a weapon staring down at all times. The actual painting process starts with whitewashing sheets of tin, upon which the posters are then drawn directly and painted using oil paints. The finished sizes range from 3 ft x 4 ft to upwards of 70 ft x 70 ft.

**Iconography:**

This section refers to vehicle art mostly for it employs more usage of icons and symbols as compared to billboard art. During the time of partition, quite a shift of hierarchy and social dominancy was created. This change was apparent in none other than vehicle art itself. The truck drivers who came from the lower classes had access to the artists who had also been dislocated during the birth of the new country. Hence the
paintings on their trucks consisted of luxurious pastimes reserved for the wealthy e.g. hunting deer, falconry, the hunting chalet as an image of heaven, peacocks and grouse wandering at leisure, mythical creatures such as Buraq (half woman, half horse).

Each and every one of these elements created in the painting had an appeal to the masses for their qualities themselves as well as the luxurious lifestyle they implied. The back of the truck usually has one large image, perhaps of a favorite politician, athlete like cricket legend Imran Khan, actor like Musarrat Shaheen or a national hero. Even the European icons have made way onto the paintings in the form of Mona Lisa or Princess Diana. Impossible sunsets in vivid colors and gardens with one large centralized flower are a favorite amongst the painters as well. Decked out with romanticized visions of Pakistani military heroes like Sarwar Shaheed, F-16 fighter jets and Ghauri missiles, some trucks become roving patriotic billboards (Kazi).

They may seem like a blur of bright colors and random folk art altogether at first glance. But there is definitely more to the eye than it seems when it comes to vehicle art. Every icon, symbol, scene or personality depicted on the truck/bus has some reason or concept behind it. It is, in a way, the voice of the artist, colors shouting out, but the message only apparent at closer scrutiny. The beautiful landscapes with waterfalls and riverside cottages might be a nostalgic tribute to the artist’s home up north. A lot of superstition also dictates the painting on the vehicles.

The eyes that ward off the evil eye, a tradition that spreads from turkey to roadside shrines in India, the mannat² cloths or religious pledges that hang from the truck

² Wish associated with desires that can be fulfilled with divine help
body etc. are all signs of the superstitious beliefs of the drivers and/or artists. The artists always sign the truck/bus with their name as well, sometimes in English or Urdu or even both. Hence it is sort of a moving advertisement for that particular artist. Jamal Elias writes in Amherst magazine that "the motifs on the trucks can be categorized in five groups:

- Idealized elements, such as the romanticized village, landscapes or beautiful women.
- Elements from modern life, such as pictures of political figures or patriotic symbols
- Talismanic and fetish objects, such as horns, yak tails and items of clothing
- Talismanically or religiously loaded symbols, such as eyes and fish
- Obvious religious symbols and images, such as Buraq (a celestial horse that is believed to have carried the Prophet Muhammad on a spiritual journey to heaven)" (J. Elias)

The front top of the truck, right above the drivers head, sometimes called the “crown” is also heavily embellished with a rose or a mosque painted on it. The use of the mosque might be to bless the truck, its driver and their livelihood.

These paintings and symbols are repainted over every couple of years, hence emphasizing on the freshness, originality and adaptation of the symbols rather than their posterity. The year it was painted as well as the artist’s name is all painted over, leaving behind no trace of the past. Hence, truck/bus art is one of the most versatile forms of art that moves around on the streets of Pakistan.

Since it is repainted over every couple of years, there is no sense of legacy but rather the chance for coming generations to express their own views with their own distinct set of icons with the changing times.
Slogans:

Pakistan is a culture highly enriched with poetry. Trucks and buses are therefore no exception to the slogans, phrases and witty lines the artists choose. In some particular cases, the drivers or artists even commission particular scholars or poets to write original poetic inscriptions for their trucks or search out a few well-turned phrases by other authors. The phrases usually display themes of distance, the journey and spiritual longing, while majority of the messages on buses have to do with love, particularly unrequited love, (Kazi) some of the textual lines painted on the trucks/buses drip with melancholy and the sense of nostalgic longing, perhaps of a broken hearted Romeo.

Others imply some religious contexts such as “Maa kee dua, Jannat kee hawa” (If your mother prays for you, it’s like a breeze from heaven) “. Several are pretty cheesy pick-up lines that one would expect along with a wolf-whistle from a stranger on the road, e.g. “I wish I were the book you are reading, so that when you fall asleep and the book falls on your chest, I would be so close to you.” The rest are simply humorous, and just leave the viewer a little puzzled!

These phrases and slogans are not left unembellished either. Script or calligraphic fonts are used. One or two outlines in bright colors also separate the text from the design around it. Usually the text lines are on the back windows and hence are very prominent on the tinted surface. That is also the best place for visibility since frequent traffic jams almost force the driver behind the bus/truck to read the line!
**Design Influences:**

All over the world, designers, writers, and theorists have stated their concurrent beliefs regarding the influence of culture on design. It is an important stimulus in the visual vocabulary. Only if a designer completely comprehends the culture he is targeting as well as their needs, will he be able to successfully produce some work which is relatable and appealing.

American writer, Hayward, H. wrote an article in *World Furniture* (1965), stating “It is within the framework of broad stylistic changes through the centuries that national cultures must be considered. Ideas have constantly flowed from country to country and from East to West. Fashions have spread in a number of ways: as a sequel to military conquest, in movement of craftsmen from one land to another…”

Stephen Bau, a designer at Domain7 Solutions Inc. is also of the opinion that “Design is based on the inspiration of past accomplishments. On that foundation, we can build upon those achievements to shape the future. Design is about life — past, present and future — and the learning process that happens between birth and death. It is about community and shared knowledge and experience. It is the passion to build on what we've learned to create something better.”

“Hence, by exploring and analyzing the use of visuals such as photos, diagrams, line drawings, and the way cultures apply visuals to approach their audiences, will we be enlightened on the design concepts and their implementation. Audience members, in both cultures, are persuaded differently by visual elements. Without careful analysis and research into these cultural implications, the designer risks developing unsuccessful texts
that do not accomplish the goals of the communication. When developing designs intended to cross cultural gulfs, designers must take into consideration cultural expectations, preferences, and practices in their texts.”(Davis, Wang and Lindridge)
Research Methodology

Having studied the literature related to my topic, the next step is to map out the strategy to acquire relevant information which will facilitate in answering my thesis question. To study the influence of local art i.e. truck/bus and billboard art on design in Pakistan, I have put together the following question “If at all, how is local art influencing design sensibility in Pakistan?"

I shall employ a qualitative route for my research since my topic doesn’t require numerical data gathering or the like. Along with that, I shall also perform empirical research which involves analyzing ad campaigns, TV commercials etc. Thereafter arises the need for interviewing the respective people who are involved with advertising and graphic design so that I can get their perspective on whether local art is being incorporated into design or not. This is the most logical way of going about conducting my research. At first the analysis of the ad campaigns will help in locating which brands have incorporated local art in their design and in what fashion. During this empirical portion of my research, I shall study different TVCs, press ads as well as product packaging as my case studies. I shall be comparing similar products, one using designs influenced by local art and the other, western sensibility. I am going to compare why such products of the same category take such different advertising approaches and which tactics prove to be more successful.

The latter portion involves interviews with the identified personalities who have been directly involved with such campaigns or have studied these forms of local art in
some manner. This data collection process will be in the form of semi structured and in-depth interviews.

Since my topic is regarding the implementation of local art in design and the mode of application, it isn’t something I can question people about rigidly. The methods I have chosen will allow me to ask questions which I feel shall help in writing my dissertation while allowing the respondent to speak freely about the topic as well.

Some of the people I am planning to interview are as follows:

Asma Mundrawala – Fine Artist

Anjum Rana – Entrepreneur, Tribal Truck Art

Zehra Zaidi – Creative Head, Adcom

Saima Zaidi – Editor, “Mazaar Bazaar”

Durriya Kazi – Head of Visual Arts, Karachi University

Empirical and Primary are the two kinds of research that will benefit my dissertation the most. The latter will help in getting to know the thought processes of the artist as well as the advertising and graphic designers.

To find out more about how local art, specifically vehicle art first started to enter the mainstream design sense, I interviewed Asma Mundrawala, a Fine Arts graduate of Indus Valley (1995) whose thesis work was rather influenced by truck art. Another reason I wanted to interview her was so that I could compare how people saw truck art at the time of her thesis and how they responded to it now. She shared a lot of valuable
information and helped me in linking the general time frame when truck art became a source of inspiration for designers and artists alike.

After establishing the timeline of vehicle art’s debut in the world of fine art and commercial design, I wanted to investigate the way it was perceived on a global level. My next interviewee Anjum Rana was an excellent candidate for this part of the research. Having started Tribal Truck Art seven years ago, she has been all around the world exhibiting objects painted with the truck art sensibility. Hence she does have quite a role in raising its awareness worldwide. Her experiences in different cities including the ones in Pakistan really shed light on how people view vehicle art here and abroad.

Simultaneously I started studying various advertisements and campaigns in the market to locate the ones which did incorporate local art in their design. The Tarang campaign was one of my main focus points as it has a lot of Lollywood glamour involved and so I contacted the person who actually came up with its concept. Zehra Zaidi, the creative head at Adcom advertising agency, is a passionate and patriotic personality who is up for promoting everything desi. Hence, she was an ideal person to talk to for she has actually incorporated local art into her design. Her interview was very informative and brought up more questions in my mind while further strengthening my research. My last interviewee, Saima Zaidi, was the editor of recently published book “Mazaar Bazaar” which consists of a couple of chapters regarding local art in Pakistan. From a designer’s point of view, this fact intrigued me to talk to her as well. However, Saima Zaidi was not too vocal in her responses and gave quite short replies to my queries.

3 ‘local’ in Urdu
Not too much of an elaborator, her interview did not prove to be as productive as I has hoped.

The last name on my list of people to interview eventually did not follow through. I was unable to get in touch with Durriya Kazi. She would have been the perfect person to talk to regarding truck art, its history, symbology etc. but unfortunately, I wasn’t able to contact her. Since I am exploring the ways in which local art is amalgamating into our design, she could have most probably helped me with some of the historical references and similar iconography being applied.

Getting in touch with a lot of the interview candidates was a straightforward task but did require some extensive time management. Anjum Rana was quite cooperative and informative as an interviewee. Zehra Zaidi also proved to be a very enlightening source on all subjects touched upon including advertising, local arts and the fervor of patriotism in our nation. Her interview led me to form several new questions and so, strengthen my research. On the other hand, Saima Zaidi was not too vocal in her responses and gave quite short replies to the questions asked. Not too much of an elaborator, her interview did not prove to be as productive as I has hoped.
Analysis

After the completion of my primary and secondary research, the former of which consisted mostly of interviews, I have come to believe that vehicle art became quite a muse to several artists in the early 90s. Indeed, any art movement or trend that gains popularity has to have a starting point. According to Asma Mundrawala, Naiza and four other artists did a project called “Heart Mehal” where they painted the inside of large freight containers like shrines or temples using the language of truck art. This exhibition took place in 1992. Hence it is safe to say that from that point onwards, vehicle art started carving its way into the commercial world.

At the moment, truck art has become a bit of a style icon, partly due to the initiative taken by designer Maheen Khan, one of Pakistan’s most noted fashion designers. Her specialty is embroidered trucks on everything from t-shirts to jeans to belts and bags at her boutique “Gulabo”. Slogans from trucks and buses have also been screen printed onto apparel. Because of the location of the shop as well as the pricing, it caters to a slightly higher class in society. Indeed it has, in a way, introduced a whole new trend in street wear. The t-shirts with a simple slogan such as “Dekh Magar Pyaar Sey” have become icons in themselves. Hence the awareness of truck art has definitely increased after the opening of Gulabo.

In 1996, several t-shirts were printed at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, bearing the slogan “Pappu Yaar Tung Na ker”. They were quite the rage and people who didn’t attend the university were rather keen to get their hands on some as well. These factors gave vehicle art a boost from simply being “local art” to a more
iconic status. Ever since then, it has been viewed in a slightly different light. It is not merely the embellishment of the vehicle’s body but a hybrid of the different provincial visual cultures that have gelled together over the course of time. It is a moving canvas which has incorporated the current icons as well as centuries old symbols together with the unique aesthetics it is famous for in the first place.

On the other hand, the popularity of Billboard art is directly proportional to the success of the film. It is no surprise that the Pakistani film industry has gone to the dogs. The films being made nowadays are far below the standard which our industry had achieved in the 60s and 70s. Hence the painted hoardings have become a means of relaying nothing but vulgarity and violence. The once thriving cinema culture has completely been disintegrated. Even billboards are hardly being painted anymore due to the invasion of Panaflex printing. There are only a few painters in Karachi who still do such work and that too primarily for Pashto films while the main hub of painters still struggles to thrive in Lahore.

Another factor regarding the negative outlook towards Lollywood billboards is the non-existent media exposure. Vehicle art has been exhibited all around the world e.g. the W-11 project in Melbourne, Australia, (see Fig.2) where a tram was completely decked up by actual truck artists from Pakistan. Vehicle art is also continually exposed through the efforts of companies like Tribal Truck Art. Unfortunately, the hoardings have been left behind on the global forefront. However their influences cannot be denied and have been explored in the Pakistani advertising.
As far as the importance of vehicle art and billboard art are concerned amongst the general public, there were a couple of shocks in store for me. Being a patron of such local arts myself, I was under the illusion that everyone around me shared my enthusiasm. When I generally think of art that is unique to my country, vehicle art and Lollywood billboards are the first to come to my mind. Nevertheless, my interview with Anjum Rana shed some unique light on the topic.

Tribal Truck Art is Anjum Rana’s seven year old brainchild which employs several truck artists who paint everyday objects with the same vehicle art sensibility (see Fig. 4). She has conducted several exhibitions overseas, all of which have been sold-out events and received great responses. She has taken Tribal Truck art to countries like Scotland, India and England, where she has also had sold-out exhibits.
In a country like India where the people consider mere slogans like “horn bajao” written on the backs of their rickshaws as vehicle art, the pieces Anjum Rana exhibited had a much higher appeal. According to Anjum Rana, they (Indians) are a much more receptive and open minded people. Pakistanis, on the other hand are very conservative in that sense and don’t give much room to this art form because they consider it to be a poor man’s work. An exhibition in Islamabad was proof of this very fact, judging by the low turnout of the crowd and their equally mellow enthusiasm. Anjum Rana also informed me of the small collection of objects she placed at the boutique, “Gulabo”. Yet again the sales had been very low. She mentioned that she has a very fixed clientele who are mainly expatriates from abroad or young people perhaps from the art field.

It is fascinating to see this kind of response from the general public towards everyday objects covered with colorful truck art designs. Even more fascinating is the fact that truck art has been replicated as well as incorporated into several advertising campaigns and packages, Jazz and Chaika to name a few respectively. The feedback these endeavors received have been quite different.
The lukewarm feedback to Tribal Truck Art is not echoed in the reactions to the ad campaigns. For example, the Jazz campaign has picked up actual motifs from truck art and fused it into their layouts. Their “No Samjhota” TVC literally starts off with the close up shot of a truck art motif, little “ghungroos”\(^4\) hanging from it (see Fig. 6), goes on to shots of a hand held fan (which is also a local craft) and the hands of a woman churning butter. All these visuals give us an idea about the kind of feel the TVC is trying to relay. Intended to target the masses, the ad is shot in a cramped street of a neighborhood, which is very rich culturally.

Throughout the TVC, small details of truck and bus art, as well as Chamak patti have been used to give the “muhalla” a more local and ethnic feel. Even in the animated part when the offer is being narrated, a triangular shape with vehicle art on it forms a repeated pattern around the screen (see Fig. 7). In the end, the Jazz logo and tagline “No Samjhota” also appear on a banner with the same motif pattern. (see Fig. 8)

In this case, the sensibility of vehicle art is not being applied, but the art itself. This is one way of application of local art in design, i.e. similar replication of select motifs etc.

\(^4\) Hollow metal spheres with small balls inside them to create sound, used for adornment.
Anjum Rana pointed out a very sad truth that we as a nation look down on our local art i.e. vehicle art but whenever it is appreciated globally e.g. at the W-II project in Melbourne, (see Fig.2) we stand tall and proudly own it. It seems as if we need the west to accept our art for us to think it worthy of our own acceptance. I did inquire Ms. Rana’s feelings as far as the Jazz and Tarang ads were concerned, her immediate response being very positive. She felt that it was a good step that both brands had taken by incorporating local art into their campaigns. When asked the same, Asma Mundrawala was of the opinion that one can’t just impose another design language onto either. Ads have really taken a plunge for the worst, especially the billboards which are becoming more of a visual clutter.

She also believed that one of the main factors stopping us from tapping into our local art or culture for design was our lack of ownership. We don’t own our culture, we don’t own our country. We have absolved ourselves of responsibility whether it’s throwing trash or breaking ques. We move our faces the other way. There are political as well as historical reasons as to why we don’t cherish our culture but it has a lot to do with lack of ownership. Batches and batches of graduates have left Indus Valley but the
market pressures are such that they have no choice but to succumb to them. What we could do is that we could all work towards it.

And so, Asma Mundrawala’s viewpoint quite clearly chalked out what the market pressure does to fresh graduates. Lack of ownership of culture, low literacy rates and just our general apathetic nature as a society prevents new designers from developing innovative designs.

Saima Zaidi, in this matter, was of the opinion that there is a natural process which takes place in every scenario. We don’t pay heed to the Persian rug lying for decades in our grandparents’ home, but as soon as it is properly displayed in a museum of ancient artifacts, our interest is roused. Another simple but effective example she gave was that of a brand new handbag. At first, we take immense care of it and never let it touch the floor. Eventually it lands on the chair and subsequently the floor. Our culture and local art are no different and it isn’t a lack of ownership but the consequence of a natural process.

I pointed out the success of our neighboring countries Iran and India in the field of communication design. Saima Zaidi reasoned that the Iranis gave much more importance to their language, the skill of calligraphy as well as typography. This is where the natural process of forgetting the worth of our culture did not take place. These factors helped them achieve their individual sensibility of design. India is a country that was insular till the 90s’. It’s only after that time that they opened up to the world and progressed tremendously. Being incredibly self-sufficient, they hardly imported any products. Proof of this fact was that Limca, a local beverage, was the preferred drink in
their country for the longest time. Where on one hand, our county looks down on our culture and equates vehicle and billboard art to something insignificant, countries like India celebrate their traditions and value them above everything else; one of the main reasons for their creative and economic success. Despite the mellow enthusiasm of our masses regarding local art, several ad campaign and package designs have incorporated vehicle art as well as Lollywood billboard art in their design aesthetics e.g. the Jazz campaign mentioned above. When asked about whether local art is influencing design, Zehra Zaidi thought that it was already being done. As the creative head at Adcom Advertising agency, she leads her team on the Tarang campaign.

According to her, “Schools and universities are already going in the “rukh” (direction) of Pakistan. It’s out there and it’s already being looked into. Hence there’s no gap between local art, culture and design.”

And she definitely follows her patriotism through in her work. She explained that they used artwork from old Lollywood film posters. She wanted the campaign to be visually “desi” with the use of garish colors, a strong characteristic of local art. The Lollywood posters have been stylized and the brush strokes of the film poster paintings have been abstracted into rough shapes which take up most of the surfaces of the package as well. (see Fig.10)

When asked about why she chose Lollywood posters as her inspiration, considering that our film industry has really gone to the dogs, Zehra’s simple reply was that this is who we are. She wanted to reflect Pakistan as it truly was. According to her, we are shy to accept who we are as a people or a nation. We gauge people by the schools
their children attend, their clothes etc. We shy away from the fact that we do watch Starplus soap operas and only admit to watching Star Movies. I would like to recall the fact here that local art itself is a loud announcement of who we are. Truck artists encode some of their thoughts in the symbols they make, e.g. a mosque signifying their wish for the blessing of God, the sole eye to ward off evil. Their paintings too, of rivers reflecting beautiful sunsets are nostalgic arrows pointing home.

Even billboard artists receive pictures and stills from the producers. After that, it is their vision to compose them into an attention grabbing symphony of colors, poses, apparel sizes, calligraphy etc. Billboard artists splash on vivid greens and purples, adding to the mood set for the hoarding. Hence the essence of both these local arts is to sound the true voice of the creator and that is exactly what Zehra Zaidi incorporated into the Tarang campaign.

What Zehra tried and successfully accomplished to do with Tarang was, that she took the vernacular and culture forward. Her brief to the designers was that if the name “Tarang” was replaced with any film name, the TVC or press ad should still work. She also mentioned that they had really set a trend by incorporating the Lollywood theme. As for the name, Zehra clarified that they did come up with some pretty modern names, but at the end of the day, finalized a local word, Tarang. It basically means to add zest to something.

Another reason why Zehra Zaidi chose to take the Lollywood-train rather than the truck art-ride was that it had been a “done-to death” sort of thing, “Koi aik kerta hai to sub kertey hain”. With Tarang they wanted to go onto a different tangent, something that
nobody else was doing at the time. There is a term in marketing called “Pockets”. Tarang targeted Punjab pockets when it started off. Eventually its popularity caused it to be pushed towards Sindh as well. In a way, since truck/bus art had already received so much exposure, it was a great effort from Zehra’s side to integrate yet another kind of local art and its sensibility into a mainstream advertising campaign.

Nonetheless, the fusion of local art into our design psyche needs a tinge of something important, glamour! It was the main tactic Zehra Zaidi employed which has given Tarang its popular status today. She couldn’t stress enough on the fact that slick presentation is always crucial. “We have so much potential in our country and we need to enhance it. We always use actors, glamour, bands, orchestras, songs sung by Indian singers, shootings done abroad in locations like Thailand etc. They are like short Lollywood films. We portray them in a slicker way like Bollywood and gloss it up.” Shops like Gulabo are also doing well because they have glorified popular local art. Hence it is all about how one takes something so local/desi and packages it better.

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

Besides glamour, there are other factors which are involved in the success of an advertising campaign, packaging etc. The sensibility being engaged must be followed
through and through in the campaign. She explained that it’s our responsibility as
designers to put in a bit of ourselves in the design. If we don’t fight for our designs, it
won’t sell. “Jazz didn’t retain its image. When I think of Jazz, I see something red but I
don’t see Jazz.” The fact of the matter is that Jazz used replicated motifs from truck art as
design elements, but never really enhanced the design to make it stand out visually. They
didn’t integrate it into their sensibility, rather simply reproduced the truck art motifs.
Eventually, this kind of superficial incorporation did not turn out to be as successful. On
the contrary, the Tarang TVC has really paid attention to all detail. If they went for
Lollywood glamour, they took it all the way. The typical dressing table lights at the back
of the package also add to the whole feel. Thus, it is crucial that the designer who works
on the project must put in his own personal effort to make the design his own. To own the
work and take pride in it really effects the overall execution.

It is yet another interesting fact that the packaging of the tea-whitener Chaika is a
small sized replication of truck art and it caters to the Northern market (see Fig.11).
When this topic was raised with Asma Mundrawala, her simple response was that
perhaps, it doesn’t require such a high level of sophistication depending on the target
audience. A small contradiction to this fact is the similar but toned down use of truck art
in the Jazz campaigns. They target the masses just like Tarang. But perhaps, it is the
minimal use of truck art which still appeals to the urban masses. Chaika’s packaging is
completely covered with truck art motifs and such a product might not work in the
general public. It all depends on market research and what the target market relates to
basically.
To incorporate a certain entity, whether completely or in an individualized manner, one must first study the source thoroughly. A particular analogy I would like to mention here is that of our religion Islam. Offering prayers five times a day and fasting for a month does not suffice for us to call ourselves true Muslims. Only when we study the Quran and the Hadith in detail are we be able to better understand the roots of the religion and the fact that it is an absolute code for life and not just a series of superficial exercises and activities.

In the same way, when one incorporates local art like truck/bus art or billboard art into their designs, the result is not extraordinary if the designer lacks thorough knowledge of the art. Such is the case with the Jazz “No Samjhota” campaign. Motifs have simply been picked up from the trucks and repeated as borders in their layouts. On the other hand, designers like Zehra Zaidi who are extremely passionate about their country and culture, have done scrupulous research into billboard art and Lollywood and whipped up such vibrant advertising campaigns such as the Tarang campaign.
It is also crucial to do market research in such a process. Along with her meticulous exploration of billboard art, she also studied how the competitors in the market were advertising. Since a lot of products had already used truck art in their design layouts, Zehra Zaidi made the decision to pursue another form of local art as inspiration while still sticking to the “desi” zesty feel.

As Lenita Davis writes “Hence, by exploring and analyzing the use of visuals such as photos, diagrams, line drawings, and the way cultures apply visuals to approach their audiences, will we be enlightened on the design concepts and their implementation…Without careful analysis and research into these cultural implications, the designer risks developing unsuccessful texts that do not accomplish the goals of the communication.”(Davis, Wang and Lindridge)

This is exactly the theory which Zehra Zaidi implemented in real life and what our designers should start to do as well. It is all about keeping the local, social and cultural trends in mind, their thorough study as well as market research. Market research is one of the crucial factors since not every product can incorporate local art into its brand image. Some expensive brands need to be advertised in a different manner to target a different section of society. Again mentioning what Asma Mundrawala said, that we can’t just take one design sensibility and impose it onto the other. There has to be some sense or logic behind the usage of any design approach.

Throughout this analysis, various campaigns and package designs have been scrutinized to understand in what ways local art has been incorporated into them. What is generally happening right now is the superficial and top layer replication of local art,
especially truck art in design. Aforementioned campaigns like Tarang have really taken the essence of the local art and culture and taken it forward rather than just duplicating a single motif as a design element in the layout.

Besides these campaigns, there are a lot of local brands coming up who still prefer to employ a more “on the surface” kind of incorporation of local art into their design. By this term, I imply mere duplication of the motifs rather than the fusion of their sensibility into ours. It is therefore quite obvious that the influence is present, but majority of the designers haven’t really made full use of it due to innumerable reasons which have been discussed above.

There are a lot of incredibly talented people in our country, whether they are involved directly with the field of design/advertising or not. I am extremely hopeful that with time, we shall be at complete ease with our culture and local arts, explore them to the maximum and form a design sensibility that is purely individual to our country!
Conclusion

After thorough research, in-depth interviews, and hours of browsing through internet and books, it has been quite an enlightening experience to pick a topic, form a question and then put all energy into finding out the answer for that particular query.

Vehicle art as well as Lollywood hoardings are both very strong visually in their own rights. The former has gained much more exposure as well as popularity because of the endeavors of people like Anjum Rana (owner of Tribal Truck Art), Maheen Khan (fashion designer) as well as several communication designers who have incorporated it (vehicle art) into their campaigns. Not only did it start appearing on apparel and fashion wear in the early 90s, but has seeped into the design psyche of the advertising industry. Only in recent times has billboard art been given a little more importance as well, a smart move on the part of Zehra Zaidi. Noticing the market trends always tilting towards truck art, she decided to take a slightly different route.

However, having gone through the whole research process, my eyes have been opened on several subjects, the very first being how Pakistanis view truck art and billboard art. It is a sad reality that we only take pride in our local arts when the west appreciates them first, taking the W-11 tram in Melbourne as an example, the “Art on Wheels Tour” or the innumerable Tribal Truck Art exhibitions that have taken place all over the world. Back home, we can’t care less. However, it is an equally interesting fact that we do relate to, and appreciate, advertisements and TVC’s which have incorporated any one of these local arts in their designs.
No matter how modernized we become as a nation, the masses still relate to their roots no matter what. It is that very reason due to which local art, be it truck art or Lollywood hoardings, still have such mass appeal, given that they have been packaged with a modern twist. After having done their market research, designers also realize this fact and thus take inspiration from local arts and traditions to come up with effective and relatable campaigns. Several brands like Jazz, Tarang and Chaika have done so, be it in TVC’s, print ads or packaging. Chaika has opted for a full fledged replication of truck art motifs on its packaging while Jazz has gone on the same route but used smaller motifs as elements in their design layouts. Tarang on the other hand has picked up Lollywood billboards and abstracted their brush strokes to form the design for the packaging. Their TVC’s are full-fledged mini-productions with elaborate colorful sets, orchestrated music and glamorous actors. These examples illustrate the several ways that local art is influencing and being fused into the design sensibilities in Pakistan.

The second matter at hand is the level of integration of local art with design. I have come to the conclusion that as designers, several of us are embracing our culture, and integrating it in a very efficient way as to appeal to the masses as well as glamorize it in their eyes. It is very important for the latter to take place for our society needs to get back in touch with our roots. Only then will we pay importance to our own customs and arts if they are promoted in a sleek modern context. Various communication designers are employing different approaches to implement the incorporation of local art into their designs. Some simply choose to replicate the truck art motifs or the like, which is more of a superficial form of adornment rather than a true integration. Others who study the masses, the market, the local art and culture itself, have a different approach and come up
with better design solutions. Currently, the former is taking place more repeatedly for people are generally opting for a fast paced money making route. Therefore they don’t follow the design sense through.

I didn’t start off my research seeking exact replications of the selected local art in Pakistan’s design field. However, that is what I came across the most. Even though the superficial method is taking place more often than mature conceptual integration of local art in design, one cannot deny the fact that at least, it is taking place. Our neighboring countries have become strong in the field of communication design because of their acceptance of their customs, traditions and local arts. They recognized their local influences and then took them to completely new levels. I believe that we have embarked on the same journey. With more designers like Zehra Zaidi, it won’t be long before all of us thoroughly and truly understand the influences of our local arts and culture, and incorporate them into our design sensibilities.

As a final thought, I have been lead to believe that local arts have great influence on our designers and great appeal for our masses. The only thing left to do is for the communication designers to thoroughly study these arts and understand our culture to help produce remarkable designs that are exceptionally molded to our society. Only then shall we be the masters of our own unique design sensibility to set us apart from the world.
Bibliography

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Appendices

My first interview was with Asma Mundrawala, a Fine Arts graduate from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. She is currently a visiting faculty at the same University.

The first question I asked Asma Mundrawala was specifically to end a debate that had been going on prior to the interview; whether she had done her thesis on truck art or not. She replied in the negative. However, following the immediate response of denial, she explained that at first, she experimented with different things and couldn’t decide what to pin down as her thesis topic. It was progressional and she didn’t start off with truck art in mind. From amongst her several drawings, her tutor found one particularly interesting. That is when Ms. Mundrawala started the process of exploration as to why that specific drawing was interesting as compared to the rest. After pursuing it, she recognized it as the visual language of truck art. Hence, she used that sensibility to create some imaginary worlds, real memoires and invented memories. There were crude colors and the work wasn’t too refined from the fine arts point of view, because of which, people assumed Ms. Mundrawala’s thesis to be on truck art even though it wasn’t a conscious effort by her.

I was curious as to when the trend to use vehicle art as an inspiration started. In 1992, Naira and four other artists who did the “Heart Mehal” project painted the insides of containers like shrines or temples using the language of truck art. So it was indeed the
fine artists who drew attention to vehicle art because it is already so rich in our visual vocabulary of our country.

When asked about whether the sensibility of vehicle art should be incorporated into our advertising and communication design, Ms. Mundrawala was of the opinion that one can’t just impose another design language onto either. Ads are really at their worst right now, especially the billboards becoming more of a visual clutter.

She also believed that one of the main factors stopping us from tapping into our local art or culture for design was our lack of ownership. We don’t own our culture, we don’t own our country. We have absolved ourselves of responsibility whether it’s throwing trash or breaking queues. We move our faces the other way. There are political as well as historical reasons as to why we don’t cherish our culture but it has a lot to do with lack of ownership. Many years of graduates have left Indus Valley but the market pressures are such that we have no choice but to succumb to them. What we could do is that we could all work towards it.

I asked Ms. Mundrawala whether she believed vehicle art to be low art or high art. Her view was that first both the terms should be defined. Usually low art is the kind of art that is made locally by people who haven’t been educated in the field of art. According to Asma Mundrawala truck/bus art is a popular form of visual expression.

She also talked about how some forms of art had transcended the high/low barrier. Miniature for example was used in the courts of the Mughals and was a form of low art but then it seeped into the studios and has now reached the level of high art.
Why do you think they used pure truck art on the “Chaika” package while it’s sort of abstractly applied in “Tarang”?

To my next question, Ms. Mundrawala had a simple response. When asked about why pure truck art had been used on the “Chaika” package which caters to North and an abstract vehicle art language on the “Tarang” package, she replied that perhaps they used truck art onto the former because the visual language is very attention catching and caters to the Northern market. According to the people who designed the package, maybe it doesn’t need the level of sophistication or abstraction that Tarang has. (Tarang has a more refined and abstract application and no pattern-like designs). It all depends on market research and what the target market relates to basically.

My next interview was with Anjum Rana, an entrepreneur who started Tribal Truck Art. She is also a respected interior designer who restores and reproduces antique furniture as well as a film-maker with an eye for the extraordinary in ordinary things.

When I stepped through the main gate of Anjum Rana’s house, my eyes met with a brilliant spread of vibrant colors and patterns, adorning everything from umbrellas and benches in the lawn, to kettles, wheelbarrows and analogue telephones inside the house. While I waited for her to join me, I feasted my eyes on the exotic colors, symbols and motifs which adorned almost every surface in sight.

When she appeared, my first question was of a numeric nature; when did she start Tribal Truck art? It had been seven and a half years ago that Ms. Anjum Rana, an entrepreneur
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who took on the task of promoting vehicle art in Pakistan, started this company. I inquired as to what her inspiration had been to choose this particular local art over all others. Her reply was that she was inspired to promote truck art because of the colors and the fact that it was done on such ordinary trucks by ordinary people who don’t even realize it’s worth.

She has conducted several exhibitions overseas, all of which have been sold-out events and received great responses. She has taken Tribal Truck art to countries like Scotland, India and England, where she has also had sold-out exhibits. A client from abroad recently bought twelve painted kettles from her and has also ordered two vases.

In India they consider mere slogans like “horn bajao” written on the backs of their rickshaws as vehicle art. Hence when they were exposed to the things Ms. Anjum Rana exhibited, they were very excited indeed. They are a much more receptive and open minded people. Pakistanis, on the other hand are very conservative in that sense and don’t give much room to this art form because they consider it to be a poor man’s work and look down upon it. An exhibition in Islamabad was proof of this very fact and very obvious due to the low turnout of the crowd as well as their low enthusiasm.

It was interesting to see the truck art motifs, patterns and symbols painted on such varying objects. When I inquired the reason of such a wide variety of objects, Ms. Rana stated that nobody ever painted on such objects. Hence painting on everyday things gives vehicle art more exposure. If someone doesn’t want to take a miniature truck home, they just might opt for a tissue box cover, kettle, vase etc. Plus, for the painters, it is an alternate source of income.
Anjum Rana also informed me of the small collection of objects she placed at the boutique, “Gulabo”. Yet again, according to her, the sales were very low. She has a very fixed clientele who are mainly expats from abroad or young people perhaps from the art field. However, despite this lukewarm response to vehicle art, we as a nation are indeed quite proud of it whenever its popularity is concerned globally.

I did inquire Ms. Rana’s feelings as far as the Jazz and Tarang ads were concerned. Her immediate response was very positive. She felt that it was a good step that both brands had taken by incorporating local art into their campaigns.

I was quite taken aback when I found out how the general public actually feels about vehicle art. I asked Ms. Rana why she thought it was so. Her response was rather realistic since it’s true that vehicle art is as common as we see trucks and buses around us all the time. We relate them to truck drivers who have a low life and so we don’t want to associate ourselves with it, or keep something with its design in our homes.

Anjum Rana related an experience she had at an exhibition in Pakistan. A lady passed a remark at her, saying that she had a lot of guts, basically implying that she was working with something that is so looked down upon.

Whether our negative response to truck art buds from Western influence is what I later inquired of Ms. Rana. She was in total agreement that we are indeed influenced by the West. She stated that people don’t realize the worth of the brass pieces that their grandparents have passed down to them. They treat such objects as mere nuisances and a hassle to maintain by polishing etc. Because people have been seeing such things in their
homes almost their whole lives, they don’t understand their worth. “People aaj kal like cut glass, crystal and shiny things” was what she ended this topic with.

The next scheduled interview was with Zehra Zaidi, the creative head of advertising agency, Adcom who worked on the concept of the Tarang campaign as well as its packaging etc.

My first question for Zehra Zaidi was regarding her source of inspiration for the Tarang campaign’s concept. She explained that they used artwork from old Lollywood film posters. She wanted the campaign to be visually “desi” with use of garish colors, a strong characteristic of local art. The Lollywood posters have been stylized. Even the packaging of the Tarang tea whitener has been uniquely designed. Each side has been treated individually and is different. Even though it was an intentional move on the designers’ part to execute every side differently, people generally don’t notice because of the same overall feel. No one in Pakistan has ever done so with packaging. The brush strokes of the film poster paintings have been abstracted into rough shapes which form most of the packaging surface.

When asked about why she used Lollywood posters as her inspiration, considering that our film industry has really gone to the dogs, Zehra’s simple reply was that this is who we are. She wanted to reflect Pakistan as it truly was. According to her, we are shy to accept who we are as a people or a nation. We gauge people by the schools their children attend, their clothes etc. We shy away from the fact that we do watch Starplus soap operas and only admit to watching Star Movies.
What Zehra tried and successfully accomplished to do with Tarang was, that she took the vernacular and culture forward. According to Zehra, her brief to the designers is that if the name “Tarang” is replaced with any film name, the TVC or press ads should still work. She also mentioned that they had really set a trend by incorporating the Lollywood theme. As for the name, Zehra explained that they did come up with some pretty modern names, but at the end of the day, finalized a local word, Tarang. It basically means to add zest to something.

I inquired why she chose Lollywood film posters as a form of vernacular inspiration and not truck art. Her immediate reaction was that it had been a “done-to-death” sort of thing, “Koi aik kerta hai to sub kertey hain”. With Tarang they wanted to go onto a different tangent, something that nobody else was doing at the time. There is a term in marketing called “Pockets”. Tarang targeted Punjab pockets when it started off. Eventually its popularity caused it to be pushed towards Sindh as well.

I asked Zehra Zaidi what their main tactic had been which gave Tarang its popular status today. Glamour! That’s what she emphasized on again and again. We have so much potential in our country and we need to enhance it. We always use actors, glamour, bands, orchestras, songs sung by Indian singers, shootings done abroad in locations like Thailand etc. They are like short Lollywood films. We portray them in a slicker way like Bollywood and gloss it up. That is the main reason for its appeal, the presentation. Films never really make it in Pakistan, but this way even the premium class gets to see these short films/TVCs. Shops like Gulabo are doing well because they have also glorified popular local art. Hence it is all about how one takes something so local/ desi and packages it better.
It’s our responsibility as designers to put in a bit of ourselves in the design. If we don’t fight for our designs, it won’t sell. “Jazz didn’t retain its image. When I think of Jazz, I see something red but I don’t see Jazz.” Tarang, on the other hand, has worked out because of its consistency. The jingle was extremely catchy. Even though we thought of letting go of it in subsequent ads, the client’s input led us to continue its usage. Engro owns both Olpers and Tarang and the latter sells a much larger amount each day.

When asked about whether local art should be incorporated into communication design, Zehra was of the opinion that it depends on the requirement of the product or project. She emphasized on the fact that we need to flaunt the local brands, so many of which have come up in our country. She revealed that she makes her children more aware about Pakistan and teaches them to respect their homeland. Being a very patriotic person, she prefers to work with people who think like her and are also patriotic. So it’s like a trickle-down effect when one person instills that sense of love for our country in the next and so on and so forth.

Next up, I met with Saima Zaidi, the editor of recently published book, Mazaar Bazaar.

Firstly, I inquired Saima Zaidi’s opinion on Tribal Truck Art and its influence. She explained that there was a certain rural/urban divide in our country but truck art is a form of local art that is across the board. We don’t paint our cars that way and people living in rural areas don’t paint their bicycles in that fashion either. At Tribal Truck Art, truck art is taken out of its context when it’s painted on a table or a mug etc. We see it then as a playful, familiar and witty take on a form of art which we see around us all the time.
I pointed out the success of our neighboring countries Iran and India in the field of communication design. Saima Zaidi’s reasoned that the Iranis gave much more importance to their language, the skill of calligraphy as well as typography. These factors helped them achieve their individual sensibility of design. India is a country that was insular till the 90s’. It’s only after that time that they opened up to the world and progressed tremendously. They were incredibly self-sufficient and didn’t import any products. Limca was the preferred drink in their country for the longest time.

When asked about why we generally employed such western sensibility in our advertising design, she replied that 80% ads are churned out by ad companies which promote imported products. Hence the same design aesthetic is applied as well e.g. for Pantene, Lux, Nokia etc.

I inquired whether local art is influencing design, to which Saima Zaidi replied that it was already being done. Schools and universities are already going in the “rukh” (direction) of Pakistan. It’s out there and it’s already being looked into. Hence there’s no gap between local art, culture and design.

The fact that we don’t give a lot of importance to our local culture and art was another point I brought up. According to Saima Zaidi, we as a nation have an “x” amount of education. We hear about grandparents having a Persian rug and we don’t pay heed to it. If the very same rug is well preserved and presented in a museum, we would view it in a different light. When one buys a new handbag, we really take care of it and at first keep it on the table. After that it ends up on the chair and eventually the floor. Hence this process happens with everything and is very natural.