An inquiry into the relationship between rising art prices and rising socio-political themes in Pakistani art

By

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Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture
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This Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of BACHELOR OF FINE ART, from Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between consumerism and art, with a focus on the use of symbols that have high consumption and evoke specific reactions. The literature records rising investment in art by 30% and expresses concern regarding the integrity of artists. This data is corroborated by research carried out on three popular galleries; Canvas, Chawakandi and Green Cardamom galleries (two in Karachi, Pakistan and one in London, England) which demonstrate a trend in the exhibition of work using symbols and themes, and large generation of profits from sold-out shows and successful auctions. The data suggests that the two are correlated; artists are opting to make commercially viable art as opposed to true self-expression to capitalize on the nature of the art market. The conclusion drawn is that although economically viable, this approach may be detrimental to artistic development and needs to return to an emphasis on honest self-expression.
An inquiry into the relationship between rising art prices and rising socio-political themes in Pakistani art

**Introduction**

Over the years, spurts of producing art for higher prices and an increase in art investment have been witnessed. This may be defeating the purpose of genuine, truthful communication of emotions and ideas displayed. The environment shapes an artist and therefore he/she may perform for society that exists rather than personal self-expression (Waitzkin, Josh; 104)

This dissertation explores symbols relevant to our culture. It discusses artists who work with specific symbols and issues, and investigates the integrity of their expression. It also discusses the art market and the rise of consumerism and examines whether both are a consequence of the increase in prices of artwork. I will compare the Pakistani art market as a means for art investment in recent years with stock markets and real estate prices to develop this theory.

Artists struggle to catapult themselves into the international market these days. Should this in any way raise concerns about the loss of identity for an artist? High prices at auction houses may give artists a boost to keep higher prices, which becomes a way of earning income, no matter how and where they are selling. This increase in price is
benefiting both fresh graduates as well as established artists. It is important to understand on what criteria artists are pricing their artwork and what the real worth of the artwork is.

To find out whether artists are concentrating on specific issues and using symbols, I picked three galleries; Canvas, Chawakandi and Green Cardamom which have been analyzed by a graphical method to find out if artists have been working with similar subjects and how this may have led to most exhibitions being a success. I will explore art blogs, which encourage artists to sell and make more value out of their work.

This dissertation is significant, because while there has been much literature on increasing investments in the arts, the link between the art market and subjects has not been explored. How an artist prices his work and whether or not it is “self-expression” or a way of earning income, is the issue addressed here. Why artists may choose to work on a particular subject is discussed.

I will begin with chapter one which includes a relevant literature review pertaining to this topic. Books and articles on self-expression, art investment and consumerist culture are analyzed. In chapter two, I discuss research methods, how I collected the data and further analyzed it, I also mention the methods used, both quantitative and qualitative. To further support my quantitative data, I analyze my graphs and numeric values in the third chapter. The fourth chapter will include a detailed discussion upon the facts that have been found. This will lead me to conclude what I set out to research in this paper, which
is whether artists in Pakistan are creating work through creative expression or for the consumerist culture.
Literature Review

The literature that this dissertation analyzes is divided into three subheadings; firstly, the self-expression of the artists and how each artist has individual ways of expressing. The second section, art market, focuses on how investment opportunities in art have increased and specifically the art market in Pakistan. The third section includes literature on how some artists emphasize certain subjects more prominently than others using clichéd icons.

An artist’s self-expression and individuality:

The author Majorie Hussain, in *Aspects of Art (2000)*, gives her view on thoughts and fundamentals of art. She defines the word “self expression” as referring to an artist’s soul, which needs to be attached to his work for it is true beauty and meaning to be delivered. She suggests that the artistic process involves researching and observing, analyzing and then reaching a conclusion through a great number of trial and errors. She further elaborates by writing that an artist needs to communicate himself with his work as this will help an artist perceive the art work with greater content and quality and not just the beauty that lies within the piece.

This view is further supported and elaborated upon by another author Harold Osborne in *The Art of Appreciation, (1970)*, who questions the right to talk well or badly about a piece of work and how people today voice their opinion without having any aesthetic knowledge about art. Osborne says that art is the product of “genius”. It involves a thought process and creativity of an artist therefore no one can apply rules or create
boundaries within it. If an artist chooses not to give a logical explanation to his work, aestheticians will boldly affirm the situation, on the other hand if the artist does think, then it is of advantage to understand the concept that has been used by the artist. Osborne observes that, a random individual man walking around on the street will boldly affirm his opinion, on questions about politics or art but on the other hand a question about other fields such as medicine, engineering or law, the random individual would turn back and defer, saying that he is not well educated in those specific fields. It is a general perception of people that knowledge is not needed to give an opinion about an artist; they feel they do not need to be qualified. Osborne defines self-expression, as a term when a person expresses himself or reveals himself to others. If an artist fails to communicate, if his work is vague then clearly he has expressed nothing about himself.

Similarly, another author who further clarifies and talks about self-expression is Josh Waitzkin in _The Art of Learning (2007)_. He says for artist to express himself through his work needs to be as clear as possible in his intentions of what he wants to produce. An artists needs to be sincere to himself, that his idea his original and not copying others. He talks about how an artist can be influenced by the environment around him. He says that an artist the same way needs to go through a process of observing, analyzing and then creating himself rather than following a certain teacher or a path which may be easy or socially desirable.

Stephen C. Pepper, in _Principles of Art Appreciation (1949)_, gives another view about how to appreciate works of art, and discusses how our likes and dislikes evolve through
conditioning. Most useful in Pepper’s writing are notions of how we perceive beauty and how we are conditioned to understand what is good or bad art. These ideas are the key to understanding why some produce a certain kind of work and why buyers may value it.

According to Pepper, a great work of art is one that satisfies human experience. The author raises another important point that appreciation does not mean to think of what uses that piece can have for us. For example, thinking how colours in the work could match the room or whether it is a good investment opportunity. “Appreciation” is buying it for what it is or the pleasure it brings.

**Investment opportunities in art and the art market in Pakistan:**

Amrita Chakraborty, *Investing in Art, An Introduction* (2007), writes that the approximate turnover from fine art auctions has jumped by 30 percent between 2003 and 2006. She writes that this growth has been due to an incredible increase in art prices and high-profile auctions hosted by Sotheby’s. She talks about how peoples’ views have changed; so that now when someone has extra cash they prefer to invest in art rather than investing elsewhere. She writes about different factors that influence buying a piece of work and believes that work bought in 1980’s at low rates can be sold off today at extremely high prices. People now look beyond the artwork’s aesthetic value; instead they are viewing it as an investment opportunity.

Similarly, Sergey Skaterschikov, *Skate’s Art Investment Handbook: The Comprehensive Guide to Investing in the Global Art and Art Services Market* (2009), is a book which lists figures, auction lists and recent best sellers from an international point of view. This
is an important contemporary book, which positions fine art as the most profitable and constant asset. Generating tens of billions of dollars, it has remained a consistently high priced market and uniquely resistant to any social and economic forces and new technologies.

Bruce Tattersall, *Art market (2010)*, supports the above statements by discussing reasons for which a buyer might want to acquire a piece of art work, aesthetics, connoisseurship, investment or speculation. He gives a clear history of how from the 16th Century onwards, artwork has been collected for worldly motives rather than religious reasons. Collecting art became popular within the middle classes and the art market expanded accordingly. In the mid-18th century, auction houses became commonplaces and artists set new price records. At this time the concept of ‘masterpiece’ was strengthened due to which a trend of increased investment was seen. The Times–Sotheby index calculated that between 1951 and 1969 the prices of Old Masters multiplied by 7 times, of Impressionists by 17½ times and of 20th-century paintings by 29 times (Tattersall).

Sumbul Khan and Rashid Arshed in *Between intention and reception, Art criticism in Pakistan (2008)*, state that even though the political situation is unstable, art has become a rather secure investment in comparison to real estate. Furthermore, it consists of articles written by art critics, gallery owners that discuss artists working on particular topics. Nafisa Rizvi writes that in the last few years, Pakistan has seen growing potential for art investment amongst buyers. Rizvi also says that no work is made in isolation; it is influenced by the cultural, social and political movements of that time. Quddus Mirza
writes that due to the pressure of the market the creative minds of individuals have transformed into a moneymaking profession. This has led artists to command higher prices for their work. Riffat Alvi refers to artwork being sold like carrots and cabbages and feels that framing units are turning into galleries overnight and artists on the other hand are turning into wholesale dealers of their work. Alvi, also feels that a canvas has turned into a currency note. Sameera Raja writes that people, who choose to buy art for its value and treat it like a commodity, or a financial viability, get no pleasure from artwork. She also feels that a certain kind of art is being promoted and wanted by the West. She feels that this box includes work typically related to political, social and gender issues.

**Focus on certain stereotypical issues and clichéd symbols:**

In an article written for *The News (April 2009)*, Quddus Mirza begins with writing about how certain incidents or stories take on an entire new long lasting effect. He mentions examples of two planes hitting the twin towers and the footage recorded of a girl being tortured by the Taliban. These are some issues that have taken place in recent years that have received a lot of media attention. Mirza, gives an example of an artist who he feels connected with the same concept, Waseem Ahmed, whose work was displayed around the same time, might have some link to the incident that have been on the news lately. He writes: “Women are depicted entangled in the web of intricate lines and a form, unfolding the way a woman is perceived in our society.” Mirza mentions that women are represented in many artworks the same way; through a feminist perspective. Some artists
work on subjects concerning current social or political issues. He further writes that this approach indicates the pressure on an artist to prepare a series of paintings for an exhibition in order to create a different set of concept and imagery for the next show. This is an example of what some artists try to do, because of which an artist might lose his personal expression and create what the consumers want to buy.

Carla Power, *Times Magazine (November 21, 2007)*, writes about different exhibitions that happen simultaneously and still go on concerning stereotypical issues. She begins her article with an exhibition at the Pakistan’s national art gallery attended by Pakistan’s President Pervez Musharraf, displaying subjects from ‘burqas to madrasahs to militarism.’ She writes “A burgeoning interest in South Asian art, coupled with the topical nature of their work, has given Pakistani artists an increasingly high profile overseas.” She discusses three Pakistani exhibitions by artists in Britain, which again capture the same moments, which were on the news and media lately; Pakistani nationalism, militarism, the Taliban and state-sponsored terrorism. These are subjects all based on either a social or political comment. She mentions artists such as, Sana Arjumand, Khadim Ali, Imran Qureshi and others. She goes on to say that NCA, National College of Art, have some graduating artists who are reinvigorating old forms with post-9/11 themes.

Atteqa Ali, *(September 2003)*, writes about contemporary art in Pakistan. She writes about artists working with the most difficult social, cultural and political issues using different techniques. Ali says that these artists are all from the contemporary scene; who attended school after 1988, Zia’s time, and are mostly contemporary artists. She gives an example of ten artists who showed their work at ‘Playing with a loaded gun’,
(September-October 2003, Apexart, New York USA.) This show offers a critique of Pakistani politics and society. She goes on to say that some people living in New York might not be accustomed to this kind of work and might not be able to relate to it, but suggestions are made through use of symbols such as guns and bombs, which convey the impression of violence. This suggests a drift of artists working towards a certain subject concerning social and political issues.

The sources discussed in this chapter represent the literature used in my further discussion. The sources examined in this section will highlight both an increase in art investment and in artists using clichéd imagery for their work.
Research Methodology

Data Collection:

Research about Pakistani art market and information about investment in art has been collected from the books and articles found at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture library. References have also been taken from art shows documented on YouTube. Art investment, being a fairly new topic has not been discussed on a large scale therefore it is difficult to find books about art market in Pakistan. Other research has been taken from books from the Karachi Gymkhana library, Karachi Club library and articles from newspapers and art magazines.

Most of the discussion, which is based upon data collected from galleries, Canvas, Chawakandi and Green Cardamom website, is what has led to the data analysis to prove that artists who worked and exhibited the past two years addressed specific symbols or social/political issues. A few artists were interviewed to ask their opinion on the symbols used in their paintings. Almost all other data is based on articles written about the artist by art critics and reporters. For international auctions and work, websites of galleries like Sotheby’s, Christie’s, Art Market Insight, and Bonham’s Dubai have been explored.

The first constraint was that I was unable to find proper data on Chawkandi Gallery; therefore while processing information and the figures for Chawkandi Gallery may not be accurate. Secondly, if I would have been able to interview more artist’s other than Bani
Abidi, I might have had a clearer view on the perception of an artist about using specific symbols in their work.

**Data Selection:**

To begin with I started off with researching art investment and art market of Pakistan in recent years, because I was very intrigued about how art had become such an important investment as well as the high prices of artwork these days. The other aspect that I had been thinking about was my community (the Dawoodi Bohra community), which is also part of my thesis work. Therefore, this was something that I was working on and was interested in earlier as well. Working on the topic, I came across some artists who tend to use certain issues or symbols more prominently in their work than other subjects. This is how my topic developed further and led me to use it as a question that needed to be researched. I started thinking about how it might be a result of the consumerism. Next, I began researching different artists using symbols and collecting data from galleries and articles about artists which have in the past two years exhibited specific political or social symbols.

The reason I chose the artists Sana Arjumand, Waseem Ahmed, and Bani Abidi are because all three of them work in a very different way but are in some way linked to each other using similar subjects. Sana Arjumand using symbols like the star and crescent, using a painterly medium, Waseem Ahmed uses intricate lines and women to portray his concept through use of miniatures and Bani Abidi who works primarily using
photography and video as a medium to express social issues. This gave me a chance to explore artists using different mediums and symbols to portray a similar subject.

Social issues, is a vast category and includes many that happen around us on a day-to-day basis. I narrowed it down to the following issues; feminism, oppression of women in society, gender inequality, identity crisis, oppressed groups, violence and chaos in society, law situation, war and most importantly symbols such as our national flag (star and the crescent), images of father of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistani stamps and the use of veil.

My aim is to find out whether artists are concentrating on particular subjects and if so is this a result of high demand for such issues. I am also interested in learning how an artist’s perception might change over the years about the art market and on what basis they price their work. The reason why I chose these three major galleries to calculate the percentage of artist working with particular subjects is because they are the most active galleries in Karachi. They are very well known and all well-established artists and upcoming artists have displayed their work in these three galleries in the past few years.
Findings

A graphical calculation of artists working with social issues, done over a two-year span of 2008 and 2009 was carried out. In order to find out about what kinds of subjects were displayed at prominent galleries in the last few years. I decided to collect information from certain galleries regarding the subjects that artists have chosen to work with for the previous two year. I selected Canvas Art Gallery, Chawakandi Art Gallery and Green Cardamom, and divided each gallery’s exhibition into eight subjects including Social issues, Cityscapes, Photography, Sculpture, Figurative, Abstract, Miniatures and Calligraphy. Finding out and collecting information of exhibitions over the past two years, I then calculated the number of artists who have worked with different subjects and put them each into a different category, according to their artist’s statement and type of work done for that particular exhibition.

Table 1: Green Cardamom – 2008 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Cityscapes</th>
<th>Photography</th>
<th>Sculpture</th>
<th>Figurative</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Miniatures</th>
<th>Calligraphy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table. 2: Canvas Gallery 2008 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Cityscapes</th>
<th>Photography</th>
<th>Sculpture</th>
<th>Figurative</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Miniatures</th>
<th>Calligraphy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table. 3: Chawkandi Gallery 2008 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Cityscapes</th>
<th>Photography</th>
<th>Sculpture</th>
<th>Figurative</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Miniatures</th>
<th>Calligraphy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A major change is seen with the movement of artists towards politically or socially motivated art. This is especially true of the Canvas Gallery, which has seen fourteen artists who have worked upon social issues during the past two years, whereas only a few artists have worked on subjects like landscapes, abstraction, sculptures, figures or miniatures.

**Art as investment:**

Reports documenting returns on art investment show that returns have increased dramatically; calculation shows that art investment has an average return of 10.5% per year compared to average investment return of 10.9% (Gross). Investors hence believe
that it is a better option to invest in art rather than real estate nowadays as returns are higher. So apart from personal satisfaction, art is also being purchased as an investment.
Discussion

The authors examined so far highlight key concerns within the world of art in Pakistan. Hussain, Osborne, Waitzkin and Pepper have each highlighted important aspects of artistic integrity. Chakraborty, Skaterschikov, Tattersall, Khan and Arshed detail the increased investments in art and the increase in profitability of the art market. And finally, Mirza, Power and Ali account for an increase in the frequency and distribution of artistic symbols in recent artwork. The findings are used to verify claims to see if there is increasing profitability in the art market in Pakistan and to highlight the assertions regarding the repetition of themes and symbols. Guided by the insights of the above authors, the examination may lead to a more educated conclusion regarding the integrity of artists in Pakistan.

The environment and the society shape an artist; Josh Waitzkin believes that some teachers want their students to create work like their teachers or use similar techniques. While some parents want their children to take art as a career and produce work like their parents. Children are taught to follow in their elders’ footsteps. Waitzkin terms this a “cookie-cutter mold” (Waitzkin). He believes that to avoid such a situation an artist needs to be as unimpeded as possible so he can produce work that is his own creation. Without structure the expression would not come through and the work would lack interest: “A great work of art, in our view, is the potentiality of a vivid and satisfying human experience” (Pepper; 13). Stephen Pepper writes than artwork that is personal is created from an experience or expression, as well as being conceptually strong. If an artist
follows the way humans are conditioned to differentiate then the work is potentially just satisfying human want.

Self-expression is a term that is important for an artist to understand. “We must avoid associating art with beauty alone lest we reject a whole world of visual experience…the quality of a work of art lies in the perception of its content” (Hussain; 2). Hussain writes that an artist to express himself well enough needs to be sincere in his intentions of what he is producing. Art is produced because an artist wants to say something and chooses a particular way of saying it (Hussain; 2). If that artist observes well enough, he knows what is relevant to him.

Some artists tend to create works that pose more questions than give answers. “By creating works that pose more questions than provide answers, the artists present current Pakistani issues in a manner that engages viewers in a dialogue, rather than submitting them to a soapbox speech” (Ali). This kind of work generally tends to attract viewers.

In order to find out what kinds of subjects were displayed at prominent galleries in the last few years I researched three galleries. Reading up on the artists work, for each exhibition, I separated them into eight different categories. A total number of twenty-eight artists worked with social issues in the given time frame. Canvas Gallery had a total number of nineteen exhibitions in 2008 & 2009, out of which nine were artists who worked on social issues, while Green Cardamom displayed thirty-nine shows, out of which fourteen were based on social issues.
I then visited and spoke with Bani Abidi to receive her response on how she deals with her subject being a social issue. Artists, who work with certain issues concerning social or political activities, usually tend work with certain symbols like the image of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The artists I discuss have exhibited work in the last two years from the galleries that I have researched.

**Artists who have worked with social issues recently:**

Waseem Ahmed displayed his work at the Chawkandi Art Gallery on 7th April 2009. Waseem Ahmed, a miniaturist painter focused on the female figure in the show. Most of these figures were seen entangled around a web of lines, and it seemed like the figures were trying to get out of them. Some of these women were drawn without a face and are positioned in a classical manner where they are either bending or kneeling down. “In most cases, a woman is represented in art works in the same stereotypical fashion” (Mirza). An article in The News (April 2009), said that his work might be a response to issues that had been taking place recently around the globe. The article also spoke about the clichéd kind of imagery that the artist had used, which could either be seen in magazines or books. “This approach indicates the usual pressure on our artist to prepare a series of paintings for an exhibition (only to switch over to a different set of imagery and concept in the next one)” (Mirza).

Waseem Ahmed’s work also sold internationally at the Sotheby’s recently for US$5000 (Sotheby’s Auction Report). This shows that market for work of such artists in the west
exists, which are considered socially linked. Artists have also been charging very high prices for a piece of work, as artists have buyers who are willing to pay such high prices.

Similarly, Sana Arjumand is another artist, who addresses strong social content through her paintings along with using symbols such as the Pakistani flag and the crescent and star. Arjumand at the Aicon Show used her wide eyes portrait with typical props of Pakistani nationalism. In one of her paintings, “I am Flexible. Are you?” A spaced-out woman, dangling like a slack marionette, bends down to pick up a crescent, in a pose of submission, both sexual and political (Power) as shown in Fig.4. For her background, she tends to use the founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah or the Pakistani flag. Arjumand is another artist who deals with very strong political connotations; “Her wide-eyed women deliver a feeling of the social issues of common Pakistani women (Schuster).”

Fig. 4: Sana Arjumand

“I am Flexible. Are you?” - 2006
She also participated in 2007, at a collaborative art exhibition with Saima Ali, at the 361 Hours in Dialogue at Broadway Gallery, which discussed people, places and current affairs in a political text (Derderian). Her solo exhibition at Canvas Gallery on Nov 4, 2008, consisted of a total of 19 paintings, out of which only two paintings did not have the symbol of the star or crescent used in them.

**An artist I interviewed, using similar symbols:**

Bani Abidi recently displayed her work at the VM Gallery in Pakistan through the Green Cardamom. Her work “explores the processes of political history, popular imagination and identity formation (Nasar, Dawood).” She uses as her backdrop either a public or a private space, investigating ideas around those areas and people. During a conversation with Bani Abidi, she said that in her last show, which was based on security barriers, a lot of people who visited perceived her work based on terrorism. Bani Abidi confesses to the fact that her work is based on social and political events. An example is a commissioned painting of a vacant room set for a presidential speech. The image includes a frame on the wall of Quaid-e-Azam, and the Pakistani flag, which are typical nationalist symbols in Pakistan as shown in Fig.5. The work hopes to raise questions about the relationship between civil society and the ever-changing face of political power in Pakistan (Nasar, Dawood).
Abidi feels that everything around her is political in some way and she agrees that artwork has been influenced by political events recently. She believes that this is due to two reasons; the first one being that although people are uncomfortable looking at the work, they are able to relate to it, and secondly because it is a way to obtain better viewer audience. She claims that usually if an artist wants to make a political statement, he or she uses a burqa or an army pattern. She feels that art buying has become part of a lifestyle, people buy keeping in consideration the brand and price. The art market has developed in a different way according to Abidi; buyers only relate work with its value. This shows that artists also feel that the art market has taken a very different turn; it is difficult to find a buyer who is willing to invest in buying new artist’s work. Buyers are more inclined to acquire work of future potential artists.
**Group shows with themes pertaining to social issues:**

A lot of shows have similar themes, with a group of artists working towards political and social arguments. A four-person show at Canvas gallery on 17th November 2009 included Zahid Hussain who, similar to Sana Arjumand used the symbol of the crescent in every painting as shown in Fig 6. Jamil Balouch on the other hand used the most common symbols for creating a political statement, the burqa and missiles as shown in Fig 7. Another artist who participated was Syed Faraz Ali, who also used the Pakistani flag. His painting ‘To whom it may concern’ is a clear cultural depiction of two countries, where he uses the Pakistani and American flag, which creates a dialogue for viewers as shown in Fig 8.

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**Fig 6: Zahid Hussain**

“Pakistan, as I see it 3” - 2009

**Fig 7: Jamil Baloch**

“Hope 1” - 2009
Exhibitions focus on particular issues that are pertinent today. These are aggressively responding to social issues, political problems, international injustices and human rights; “When the General opened Pakistan's National Art Gallery in August, he was confronted with gutsy pieces tackling an array of provocative subjects — from burqas to madrasahs to militarism (Power).” Another well-timed exhibition at London’s Aicon Gallery, had work concerning women’s status, sexuality, environment, poverty and natural world. Another example is of the exhibition called ‘Playing with a loaded gun’ which is a critique of Pakistani politics and society (Power). Even though, artists feel that not everyone is able to relate to it from other cultures but the impression of violence is conveyed through the kind of symbols used by the artists. Artists work with the kind of subjects using different methods and techniques but do not realize that the same thing is being said.
These works displayed as art pieces are a debate that is circulating within Pakistan since the last forty years. Most of these are concerned with the political and social unrest present in the country. Artists portray such works through using a common symbol of either national identity or religious identities. Even though the country is transforming, artists have been working with subjects that grasp the viewer’s attention. Some artists view it as a way of gaining attention and creating dialogue while some work with the similar concept but feel that they are influenced by such ideas as they are living in a socially and politically constructed environment.

**Increase in Art Investment over the last few years:**

Artists who work to gain attention of the audience are succeeding very well. This is one of the many reasons why art investment over the years has increased immensely. Many investors believe that art investment is a more secure investment than real estate and stock markets. This is because art investment has an average return of 10.5% per annum (Daniel). The other reason why art is considered a better investment opportunity is because stock market and real estate have greater risk involved, while artwork unless physically damaged will not lose its value. It always has the potential of going higher. Investing in art does not need any experience but an artistic style. It is believed that the art market is growing at such a fast pace that within a few years, the work bought in the 1980’s can be sold at a very high prices (Chakraborty).

The last decade has seen growth in the art market. Most exhibitions one attends are sold out. Khadim Ali recently had a show at Chawkandi Art Gallery, and all of his paintings
sold out by the second day of his show. In 2002, Aisha Khalid’s work was sold out before it was transported to the gallery from the airport. "I know buyers who have been sending their servants to book entire shows before they open” says Saquib Hanif, a collector and art critic based in Karachi (Hanif). He notes that this trend is different from the 1980’s when artists would take a long, hard look at one piece to decide whether it was worth hanging on the wall. Another article by BBC News states: “Most art exhibitions around the country these days, nearly all the paintings carry red tags - meaning they are sold (Khan).”

Given the increased interest in art investment, quite a few authors have written books with guidelines for investing in art. Such books give information on how to choose an artist who will be of greater investment opportunity in future and why investing in art is a better option. The growth in collecting art is seen either for aesthetic and worldly motives, rather than for its creativity or the satisfaction that it may bring you. People will see how great a ‘masterpiece’ the work is (Tattersall), for example a Van Gogh that is sold for £20 million today would have been impossible to sell at the same price when the artist was living (Chakraborty). Art investment has become one of the most profitable investment opportunities of today.

“Art prices have shot up in the last five years, the main reason being that now our art is traded in the international art market.” Global communication with the local market is strengthening the ability of the local artist’s to stay at the level of international market denominated in dollars and pounds (Khan, Arshad; 22). This change in pricing also
excludes a large number of people from acquiring original art. Patrons who now acquire art are sometimes concerned just with the creditability and value of the work. “The art boom sprang on us suddenly and so a number of people devoid of any sense of aesthetics became ardent art lovers overnight (Khan, Arshad; 20).”

The nature of the work by Pakistani artists has given Pakistani art an increasingly high profile overseas. The hype of artists in the international market is shocking. In 2006, one of Tasadduq Sohail’s works sold for $32,000 at an international auction. A lapis lazuli mosaic in metal by Ismail Gulgee sold for $336,000 at Bonhams' Dubai auction in March and in September 2006, Rashid Rana’s, “A Day in the Life of Landscape”, a digital print, sold for $133,000 at Christie’s (Rajan). More recently, Adeela Suleman’s work titled “Lie together” was auctioned on 17th September 2009 in New York, for US $7500 “Lie together”. Another Pakistani artist Farida Batool’s work titled “Love letter to Lahore” was auctioned at US $7000 (Sotheby’s Auction Report). The high profile of auction houses such as Sotheby’s has led to increase of art prices, giving approximately 30 percent turn-over every year during the past few years (Chakraborty).

The high price fashion, is dominating the work of artists; they tend to compare price with others, not realizing what the real value of a piece is. A website states “This is 100% legit time-tested art business, which shows that people buy art work for high prices, and I'm going to tell you exactly what this stuff is and how to do it. Ready to increase your net worth? Excellent (Bamberger).” What this means is that an artist is affected by the
environment and therefore, people are creating such websites which makes an artist drift away from their own satisfaction to satisfying others around them.

Both young graduates as well as well-established artist are charging very high prices, most graduates only talk in millions now. When Khadim Ali, in his last exhibition at Chawkandi art gallery, was asked about how he prices his work, he replied saying, “It depends on what range your buyers are willing to buy your work at.” His paintings vaguely ranged from 300,000 to 500,000. Naseer Ahmed in one of his interviews states, “He wants to get rid of the high-price fashion which is used to increase the hype of new artists. He thinks experience of the artist should play a more dominant role.” Even though artists may willingly not want to do so, sooner or later they do get carried away, because consumers are buying to buy art at such high prices.

“For now the international market looks very attractive, but this is a short term approach, eventually the western romance will end (Khan, Arshad; 21).” The promotion of a certain kind of art at higher prices needs to end because this is making Pakistani art slotted in a kind of a box consisting of buyers who are businessmen and bankers. Artwork should not be traded like stocks because then the value of the work remains is equivalent to a currency note (Khan, Arshad; 19).

Above all, it is still important to keep in mind that an art work has a particular significance to the artist but when exhibited, it can have a very different meaning from the responses of experiences and environment that some other comes from. As artwork is
interpreted on various levels, the response from an art critic or a general viewer can be viewed in a negative manner (Khan, Arshad; 3). Another important aspect that we must also consider is that no work of art is made in isolation, and is therefore a continuation of a larger part (Khan, Arshad; 8). Therefore, it is for the artist to decide whether the artwork is for him to be engaged towards or for viewer’s satisfaction and a response to the consumerist culture.
Conclusion

The claim to be investigated was whether artists are using clichéd symbols and creating work only with social and political subjects. A critical examination of the literature on the art market reveals that there has been transformation of individuals recognizing art not just as a profession, but a highly profitable venture. This has led some artists to create work purely for the satisfaction of the audience, and as a result this has led to an increase in art investment over the years by about 30% from 2003-2006 (Chakraborty).

The results from the Canvas Art Gallery, Chawakandi Art Gallery and Green Cardamom Galleries show that artists have been focusing on particular subjects more than others, particularly in the social and political themes. This is also correlated with the fact that the selling value of art within these themes is fairly high, especially at international auction houses ranging from USD 5000 to USD 350000.

The analysis discounted the possibility of coincidence in artistic themes occurring within a time frame. This problem is amplified by small number statistics; the small size of the sample of galleries and artists examined leads to greater risk of making inaccurate assumptions. The rising prices may also be attributable to inflation and the collapse of economic giants making art a safer investment. The analysis further discounts the increase of politically charged artistic content as a consequence of increased globalization. The limitations of the analysis leave open the possibility that the pattern
observed is a misinterpretation of the data, or that the trend is a consequence of factors that have not been accounted for.

However, the limitations of the study fail to completely address the rise in prices and the increase in art investment. It is therefore important to realize that there is strong evidence to suggest that artists may be compromising their integrity in order to produce economically viable work. The analysis and conclusions of the study primarily emphasize further examination of the relationship between art and economics, and more importantly the integrity of the artists themselves.

“The art boom sprang on us suddenly and so a number of people devoid of any sense of aesthetics became ardent art lovers overnight (Khan, Arshad; 19).” I believe true appreciation of artwork lies beyond economic benefits. True artists recognize the value of work lies in being honest than being profitable. It is the nature of the artist that might be lost if the market practices take over, and it is this trend that is highlighted by the research. Artists should aim to profit, but not at the expense of their integrity.
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