



Undergraduate Research Conference

 Indus Valley School Of Art And Architecture

2026



Undergraduate Research Conference

APRIL 11 | 9 AM - 5 PM

2026

Indus Valley School of Art And Architecture



PROGRAM

8:30 Registration of Participants

9:00 Welcome Address, Member of Student Organizing Committee

9:15-10:45

Panel 1 - Space, Knowledge and Memory

Discussant: Rafi Ahmed, Visiting Faculty, Interior Design, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture

Panelists:

Sunnan Ali & Shanzay Laghari, IBA, Class of 2027. *Manora's Fishermen: Identity, Culture, and Informal Livelihoods in Salehabad*

Adeena Irfan, IVS, Class of 2025. *Spatial Illusions: Reconstructing the Idea of the Center*

Muhammad Abdullah, NCA, Class of 2025. *Fasana-E- Kafir Kot*

Zuhair Omer, IVS, Class of 2025. *Rethinking Spatial Structure: From Fixed Forms to Systems of Relationships*

Tea Break

11:00-12:30

Panel 2 - Cracks in the Concrete: Inequality and Ecology in Karachi

Discussant: Fizza Qureshi, Visiting Faculty, Liberal Arts, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture

Panelists:

Amna Lakha & Zoya Hemani, IBA, Class of 2027. *Echoes of Tomorrow: The Hidden Costs of E-Waste in Shershah Kabari Market, Karachi*

Aysha Khan, Habib University, Class of 2026. *Deconstructing the River of Concrete: Malir Expressway, Ecology and Memory*

Munaza Fatima, Habib University, Class of 2025. *Social Capital, Civic Engagement & Urban Livability in Karachi: A Case Study of Karachi's Cultural and Communal Spaces*

Faaz Ali, IVS, Class of 2025. *Duality of Social Housing in Karachi's Urban Fabric*



PROGRAM

Lunch Break

1:30-3:00

Panel 3 - Cultural Practices and Identities in Motion

Discussant: Dr. Aasiya Kazi, Head of Department and Assistant Professor, Liberal Arts, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture

Panelists:

Mishaal Hussain, LUMS, Class of 2025. *From "4-star to 5-star": The Spatial Transformation of Baba Syed Safdar Ali Bukhari's Sufi Legacy in Contemporary Lahore*

Hiba Ashfaque, IVS, Class of 2025. *Just a (Curated) Girl: A Critical Analysis of Girlhood & Gender Performance in the Digital Sphere*

Nayma Ahmed Ali, Habib University, Class of 2026. *Songs from a Burning Harmonium: Sonic Reconstruction of Identity amongst Afghan Refugees in Urban Karachi*

Breeha Tarar, COMSATS, Class of 2025, *Tarz: Exploring New Forms in Urdu Typography*

Tea Break

3:15-4:45

Panel 4 - Fashioning the Self: Doing and Undoing Gender in Life and Art

Discussant: Jawziya F. Zaman, J.D., Visiting Assistant Professor of Practice, Communication and Design, School of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Habib University

Panelists:

Sobh Saeed Rid, Habib University, Class of 2026. *Cutting the Rope: Women's Agency in Rural Sindh*

Arish Amirali, IVS, Class of 2025. *Performing Her, Desiring Him: Trans Women and the Misrecognition of Queer Desire in Pakistani Films*

Muhammad, IVS, Class of 2025. *Masculinity and Desire at the Tubewell*

Shahrez Chauhan, University of Edinburgh, Class of 2025. *Turning Queer Lives into Art: Aestheticising Queer Subjectivity in the Modernist Literary Tradition*

4:45 Concluding Remarks by Dr. Faiza Mushtaq, Dean and Executive Director, IVS

2026 Conference Committees



Faculty Organizers

Syed Haider Abbas Naqvi, Lecturer, Liberal Arts

Hafsa Saeed, Lecturer, Liberal Arts

Faculty Selection Committee

Adeela Shah, Assistant Professor, Foundation Year

Ayesha Sarfaraz, Assistant Professor, Architecture

Sadia Kausar, Assistant Professor, Textile Design

Wafa Ali, Assistant Professor, Interior Design

Dr. Aasiya Kazi, Liberal Arts

Hafsa Saeed, Lecturer, Liberal Arts

Syed Haider Abbas Naqvi, Lecturer, Liberal Arts

Student Selection Committee

Afrak Ghous, Fine Art

Areesha Shaikh, Fine Art

Amama Afghan, Fine Art

Dua Hamid, Communication Design

Fatima Sohail, Fine Art

Hajra Nadeem, Fine Art

Maryum Usmani, Communication Design

Samiya Asim, Fine Art

Student Outreach Committee

Syed Taymoor Kazmi, Architecture

Hina Binte Mansoor, Architecture

Rumeesa Altaf, Fine Art

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Student Event Management Committee

Areesha Imran, Fine Art

Areesha Shaikh, Fine Art

Amama Afghan, Fine Art

Dasha Darvaj Umrigar, Communication Design

Dua Hamid, Communication Design

Fatima Sohail, Fine Art

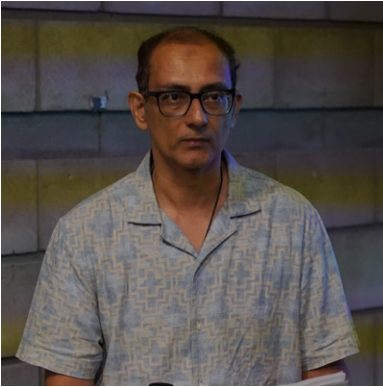
Hajra Nadeem, Fine Art

Maryum Usmani, Fine Art

Samiya Asim Syed, Fine Art

Shah Bano Ali, Interior Design

Panel 1: Space, Knowledge and Memory



Discussant:

Rafi Ahmed, Visiting Faculty, Interior Design, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture

Rafi Ahmed has a Master's degree in Architecture from Washington University in St. Louis, USA. He has worked for several design firms in the US and Pakistan and is currently engaged at Design Group Practice in Karachi. He is a visiting faculty at the department of interior design at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, where he has taught both studio and theory courses. He has previously also taught in the department of Architecture at this institution. He has participated in several design exhibitions organized by the Institute of Architects and the ID department, in addition to co-curating a group exhibition titled Drawing a Line. More recently he was on the editorial team for the latest volume of the school's multi-disciplinary journal Hybrid (volume 7: Hot).



Panelists:

Sunnan Ali & Shanzay Laghari, IBA, Class of 2027.
Manora's Fishermen: Identity, Culture, and Informal Livelihoods in Salehabad

Abstract:

Since the establishment of the state of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, it has been proactive in creating national identities and even developing the skeleton of its urban areas in a manner that gives prominence to both the Islamic and modernist ideologies. As these projects aim at unification and development, they have been at the expense of marginalizing indigenous and ethnic identities that were inhabiting particular urban and coastal spaces. This paper argues that the Salehabad neighborhood of the Manora peninsula demonstrates the physical and social manifestations of selective state governance, urban marginality, and the systematic neglect of the indigenous knowledge and expertise of Baloch and Sindhi fishing communities.



Adeena Irfan, IVS, Class of 2025. *Spatial Illusions: Reconstructing the Idea of the Center*

Abstract:

Since time immemorial, architecture and urban design have been built around the idea of centrality as a fixed core, controlling movement and spatial hierarchy. However, this research paper defies this claim of centrality being indispensable, inquiring whether space can exist without a dominant focal point. This study interrogates: Is centrality an absolute condition of spatial organization, or can architectural meaning emerge through fragmentation, decentralization, and disruption?

This research uses qualitative methods, combining historical case studies and theoretical discourses, alongside primary data collection through surveys and interviews. It analyzes architectural projects as precedents and urban environments that expand on, as well as challenge, conventional notions of centrality – describing how movement, scale, social interaction, and spatial hierarchy influence the perception of space. Case studies include landmarks, markets, public spaces, and architectural typologies where the absence of a singular center may result in dynamic, networked configurations.

Some of the key findings of this study suggest that centrality is not merely a physical construct, but rather an ideological one that is rooted in historical, political, and cultural narratives. Spaces that reject a defined center often foster more fluid, adaptable, and participatory forms of engagement. This raises a critical question: Does the dissolution of centrality lead to disorder, or does it enable new spatial possibilities? Can decentralization create a more democratic spatial experience?

The study shows that we need to rethink centrality through spatial organizations in architecture and urban design. Instead of seeing a lack of a central point as empty space, we can view it as an opportunity for new forms of spatial agency, flexibility, and multiplicity. By deconstructing traditional notions about hierarchy, this research opens up pathways to rethink how we inhabit, experience, and shape our environment.



Muhammad Abdullah,
NCA, Class of 2025.
Fasana-E- Kafir Kot

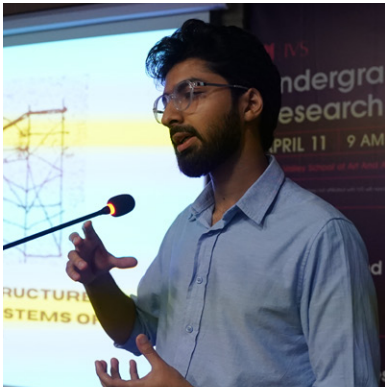
Abstract:

This research examines how local communities experience, remember, and emotionally engage with Kafir Kot, a Hindu temple complex in Bilot Sharif, Dera Ismail Khan, despite its absence of ritual practice and its recognition as a ruin's heritage site. Rather than approaching Kafir Kot solely as an abandoned monument or a neglected minority site, the study investigates how it remains active within local consciousness through memory, myth, fear, and narrative.

The research draws on qualitative methods, including fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and visual documentation. The theoretical framework is informed by concepts of cultural memory and lived heritage, focusing on how meaning is produced through everyday narratives rather than formal institutional recognition.

Findings reveal that ghost stories, beliefs about jinn, childhood memories, stories of hidden gold, and informal warnings shape local perceptions of the site. These narratives create a form of indirect engagement, where people relate to Kafir Kot without physically inhabiting it. As a result, the site continues to exist as a space of fear, curiosity, and speculation within collective imagination.

By foregrounding these intangible forms of engagement, the research challenges rigid distinctions between living and dead heritage, suggesting that cultural presence can persist beyond ritual use through memory, emotion, and storytelling.



Zuhair Omer,
IVS, Class of 2025.
*Rethinking Spatial
Structure: From Fixed
Forms to Systems of
Relationships*

Abstract:

By default, architecture has a lot to do with permanence. Buildings cannot simply constantly change or relocate because of the human need for shelter, community, and stability. However, much of contemporary architecture has become about critiquing lack of adaptability and change, particularly in response to increasingly complex and dynamic social, technological, and environmental conditions. Building upon Greg Lynn's idea of the multiplicitous spatial body and Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of the rhizome and the assemblage, this paper aims at developing a deeper understanding of what it means for space to be static or non-static.

Using 3D digital experimentation and comparative analysis as methodologies, this research attempts to answer the question: What possibilities emerge from understanding space as a system of relationships? Towards the end of the paper, this idea of a system of relationships is applied on the thelay wala (street vendor) and an informal streetscape to understand ideas of adaptability, growth and networks, revealing how ideas of system, growth, and adaptability are present in phenomena around us and relevant examples to develop our understanding of the built environment and space.



Panel 1: Space, Knowledge and Memory



Panel 2: Cracks in the Concrete: Inequality and Ecology in Karachi



Discussant:

Fizza Qureshi, Visiting
Faculty, Liberal Arts,
Indus Valley School of
Art and Architecture

Fizza Qureshi is an urban planner, researcher and journalist whose work sits at the intersection of urban development, the built environment and politics. She has produced research on urban dynamics in South and Southeast Asia, engaging with cities such as Karachi, Sukkur, Hong Kong and Taipei in her work. In Karachi, she has been actively involved with community organizing around issues of anti-poor urban policies, housing and climate change for more than five years. Currently, she produces multi-media stories on urban issues with Soch Videos, and teaches urban planning theory at IVS.



Panelists:

**Amna Lakha
& Zoya Hemani**,
IBA, Class of 2027.
*Echoes of Tomorrow:
The Hidden Costs of
E-Waste in Shershah
Kabari Market, Karachi*

Abstract:

The rate of digital consumption has made electronic waste one of the fastest growing waste streams in the world. This growth brings environmental and climatic issues that affect many regions and populations disproportionately. While e-waste has been regarded as a technical waste management or public health problem, this paper proposes that the issue of dismantling e-waste should be considered under a climate and development lens. This is located in the political and economic structures of informality, regulation neglect, and uneven global exchanges.

Shershah Karachi is one of the largest informal e-waste dismantling hubs that exist in the heart of developing countries. Hence, this study examines the everyday dismantling practices that lead to localized environmental damage and climate vulnerability. This research applies a thematic analysis by employing the political ecology perspective that engages with secondary qualitative data of academic literature, policy documents, reports, and journalistic sources. The findings of this research reveal that the informal dismantling is part of a survival economy which sustains through unequal power relations. In this situation, environmental and climate risks become normalised and are being imposed on marginalised workers, including children. Practices like open burning, basic metal extraction, and unregulated disposal make the situation worse for air

pollution, for heat and for the environment. At the same time, there are failures in governance, and selective state neglect makes these problems politically invisible. This paper describes the interplay between global flows of e-waste, the lack of regulation enforcement and the lack of formal infrastructure for recycling that creates the perfect storm pushing the costs of climate change and environmental damage onto urban peripheries. By reframing e-waste dismantling as an important aspect of climate vulnerability and uneven development, in this study, we highlight the shortcomings in climate policies, which do not consider informal economies. It highlights the importance of methodologies based on workers and centered on justice in the urban climate governance



Aysha Khan,
Habib University, Class
of 2026. *Deconstructing
the River of Concrete:
Malir Expressway,
Ecology and Memory*

Abstract:

Karachi's urban history is closely tied to its river systems, which have long sustained indigenous communities through agriculture, water access, and cultural practices. This paper examines how the construction of the Malir Expressway (MEX), framed as a development project, has transformed the Malir River from a life-sustaining ecological system into an extractive infrastructure corridor. Drawing on qualitative interviews and site-based observations, the study documents the impacts of expressway construction on multigenerational Balochi communities residing along the riverbanks. Findings show that disruptions to river flow, sand mining, groundwater depletion, and pollution have eroded livelihoods, ecological resilience, and collective memory, while severing everyday social and cultural relationships with the river. Engaging frameworks of ecological urbanism, hybrid ecologies, and third space, the paper argues that the MEX exemplifies a model of capitalist urban development that privileges elite mobility at environmental and social costs. The study calls for reimagining development through relational, ecologically grounded urban practices to sustain both human and non-human life.



Munaza Fatima, Habib University, Class of 2025.
Social Capital, Civic Engagement & Urban Livability in Karachi: A Case Study of Karachi's Cultural and Communal Spaces

Abstract:

There is a general perception and existing discourse suggesting that Karachi, once celebrated as a cultural hub and the cosmopolitan "City of Lights," has experienced a profound decline in urban livability due to various factors, including ethnic fragmentation, political violence, and weak governance. This study seeks to further explore this narrative by examining the correlation between the erosion of social capital, the absence of civic engagement, and the failures of urban development, with a particular focus on the resulting impact of this fragmentation on Karachi's communal and cultural spaces. This connection and interface are considered important as it has been seen that cities that celebrate and invest in their cultural diversity are often found to be more inclusive and socially cohesive. Drawing on social capital theory, the theory of civic engagement, and the concept of the right to the city, this study investigates how negative shifts in city's social capital and inclusivity have had implications on the cultural realm. Using mostly a qualitative approach, the study employs in-depth interviews with urban planners, policymakers, cultural professionals, and community members, complemented by field observations of key cultural and communal spaces and a survey analysis of youth perceptions and older generation's interaction with Karachi in the past. Findings reveal a significant decline in cross-cultural connectivity, spaces and activities, exemplified by the disappearance of certain spaces in areas like Saddar and the weakening of key cultural institutions. This trend is linked to a shifting political culture since the 1970s and a sustained lack of government interest in cultural revival, resulting in isolated cultural events rather than sustainable models. These findings underscore the correlation between eroded social capital, reduced civic engagement, and declining urban livability, highlighting the urgent need for community-driven creation of new cultural spaces on multiple scales alongside government support for cultural preservation and rebuilding social capital.

Group Photos



Panel 3: Cultural Practices and Identities in Motion



Discussant:

Dr. Aasiya Kazi,
Head of Department
and Assistant Professor,
Liberal Arts, Indus Valley
School of Art and Archi-
tecture

Dr Aasiya Kazi is currently the Head of the Liberal Arts Programme and Assistant Professor at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. Her research interests include gender, migration, education, social movements, human rights and urban studies. She holds a BA in Government from Smith College, an MA in Human Rights Studies from Columbia University, and an MPhil in South Asian Studies and a DPhil in Anthropology from the University of Oxford.



Panelists:

Mishaal Hussain,
LUMS, Class of 2025.
*From "4-star to 5-star":
The Spatial
Transformation of Baba
Syed Safdar Ali Bukhari's
Sufi Legacy in
Contemporary Lahore*

Abstract:

In contemporary Pakistan, urbanisation and modern religious sensibilities have reconstructed the spaces of popular devotion, often sidelining the diverse, embodied, and inclusive practices associated with Sufism. Employing gender studies and spatial theory, this research examines how gender relations and spatial dynamics interweave to mould religious expression. Heera Mandi, formerly acclaimed as the cradle of music and dance, is now frequently portrayed in public discourse as a site of moral degeneration, thereby masking its complex, gendered histories of faith. However, the legacy of Baba Syed Safdar Ali Bukhari (1940–2005), a Malamati saint known for his unconventional healing practices in Heera Mandi, offers an alternative perspective on divine intimacy, repositioning the district as a locus of spirituality. The study assesses the ritualistic and spatial transition of dhamal, music therapy, and Surah Rehman therapy from the "four-star" Heera Mandi to the "five-star" suburban dua rooms, highlighting both continuities and transformations in memory, space, and audiences.

By examining the suburbanization of spirituality, this study not only builds on frameworks like Nile Green's 'Bombay Islam' (2011) but also advances scholarship by emphasizing rituals and lived experiences within spirituality as key dimensions of religious change and transformation. Utilizing ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, archival and visual data, this research

demonstrates that devotional practices previously rooted in affect, sound, and bodily expression have been reconfigured to align with suburban aesthetics, technological mediation, and gendered restructuring. Within the 'Mast Mast Healers' community, led by Dr. Muhammad Javed Ahmed ("Dr. Baba"), these rituals continue in transformed forms. Rather than interpreting this transition as erasure, the study conceptualizes it as the "suburbanization of spirituality," a process that maintains the ethical and affective core of Baba Ji's teachings while adapting to new socio-spatial contexts. This analysis illustrates how disempowered spiritualities sustain and reconstitute their sacred meanings amidst shifting urban landscapes, revealing the fluid and evolving nature of spiritual life in Lahore.



Hiba Ashfaque,
IVS, Class of 2025. *Just a (Curated) Girl: A Critical Analysis of Girlhood & Gender Performance in the Digital Sphere*

Abstract:

Over the last decade, the phrase 'girlhood' has gained increasing prominence within mainstream digital culture as a distinct form of gendered identity expression, closely influencing the ways in which women and girls view themselves online. While ideas of girlhood in digital spaces are primarily presented as ironic sentiments that lightheartedly reflect on the experience of being a girl, this paper proposes that it is important to call into question the power and impact said irony or humour holds, especially in the context of the identity-formation of women online.

In the case of girlhood, while it is apparent that the individuals participating in the usage of the term are largely adopting humour to make sense of their lives, the continuous repetition of certain stereotypical behaviours in online spaces can further normalise misogynistic or gender essentialist notions about women. By using digital ethnography as its primary method of observation, this paper thus frames girlhood as a phenomenon with a social reality of its own, with ever-evolving, fast-paced visual trends, and argues that it is crucial to examine said social reality, analyse the content that is produced within it, and consider its compliance with broader capitalist and patriarchal structures.



Nayma Ahmed Ali,
Habib University, Class
of 2026. *Songs from a
Burning Harmonium:
Sonic Reconstruction
of Identity amongst
Afghan Refugees in
Urban Karachi*

Abstract:

This thesis examines how Afghan refugees in urban Karachi reconstruct identity, belonging, and memory through sonic practices. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Afghan refugee youth and families, the project explores how music, language, and everyday listening function as modes of self-making in conditions of displacement. Building on Steven Feld's concept of acoustemology — sound as a way of knowing and being in the world — and Don Ihde's phenomenology of listening, this study argues that identity reconstruction is not merely cognitive or narrative but fundamentally auditory and relational. Afghan refugees navigate Karachi's dense and often hostile sonic terrain — from bus horns to multilingual public arguments — while simultaneously sustaining sonic continuities through Afghan songs, raga-based musical traditions, and Persianate linguistic forms. Rather than framing these practices solely as hybridity, this thesis highlights tensions between cultural continuity and imposed political borders. It also engages with theories of memocide to argue that sonic memory becomes a form of cultural survival and everyday resistance in the face of displacement and erasure. Through close ethnographic attention to linguistic soundscapes, musical performance, and affective encounters, this project contributes to debates in sound studies, migration studies, and linguistic anthropology by foregrounding sound as central to migrant subjectivity.



Breeha Tarar,
COMSATS, Class of 2025,
*Tarz: Exploring New
Forms in Urdu
Typography*

Abstract:

With an emphasis on its historical growth and adaptability in the digital age, this thesis explores the challenges and adaptation process of Urdu typography. Urdu language, which has its roots in the Persian-Arabic script and is characterized by the elaborate Nastaliq style, has had a difficult time integrating into contemporary digital platforms. These difficulties include the script's cursive nature, technological constraints, and English's sociolinguistic dominance, which has made Urdu less prominent in every aspect.

The study examines how Urdu typography's underrepresentation affects national identity and cultural preservation while highlighting its cultural and practical value. It also looks at initiatives to update and digitize Urdu typefaces while addressing their flexibility and usability issues.

This thesis, in its finality, proposes a new Urdu typeface as a contribution to the limited pre-existing contemporary typefaces in order to meet modern design requirements. It also promotes Urdu typography's function in maintaining Pakistan's linguistic identity and cultural legacy by igniting interest in it.

Group Photos



Panel 3: Cultural Practices and Identities in Motion



Jawziya F. Zaman is a writer, editor, and former attorney. She has built a distinctive interdisciplinary career, combining expertise in law with a strong creative and editorial portfolio. Her fiction, non-fiction, and reviews have been published in outlets such as CRAFT Magazine, The Aleph Review, Himal Magazine, Inklette, Dissent Magazine, and others.

Discussant:

Jawziya F. Zaman,
J.D., Visiting Assistant
Professor of Practice,
Communication and
Design, School of Arts,
Humanities & Social
Sciences, Habib University



Panelists:

Sobh Saeed Rid,
Habib University, Class
of 2026. *Cutting the
Rope: Women's Agency
in Rural Sindh*

Abstract:

This paper examines how rural women from the Khairpur District of Sindh are exercising agency despite living in entrenched patriarchal contexts. It challenges reductive portrayals of Pakistani women in rural areas as either passive victims or overt resisters of tradition by re-theorizing agency and rooting it in local definitions. Using primary fieldwork research, it illustrates that women's agency in Khairpur is shaped by the interplay of culture, religion, social class, political awareness and education. Culture emerges as the most persistent barrier and religion, rather than solely limiting agency, can sometimes provide frameworks through which women exercise it. The findings demonstrate that agency often operates within, rather than outside of, patriarchal structures. Women reinterpret religious teachings to justify divorce or consent in marriage, pursue education alongside domestic responsibilities, and leverage income generation to renegotiate household authority. These strategies do not necessarily seek to dismantle tradition; instead, they rework it from within.



Arish Amirali, IVS, Class of 2025. *Performing Her, Desiring Him: Trans Women and the Misrecognition of Queer Desire in Pakistani Films*

Abstract:

This thesis explores the cinematic portrayal of trans women in contemporary Pakistani films, focusing on the 2022 Pakistani film *Joyland* and the 2019 short film *Darling*, both directed by Saim Sadiq. Through close textual analysis and qualitative interviews with two self-identified trans women based in Pakistan, the study interrogates how trans femininity is represented not as autonomous subjectivity, but often as a surrogate for repressed queer male desire. This paper identifies recurring patterns of fetishization, emotional displacement, and narrative instrumentalization of trans-identifying characters, whose function is less as a protagonist and more as a narrative device to facilitate the cis male self-discovery. The interviews reveal how such portrayals resonate with, but also distort, lived trans experiences—evoking feelings of both recognition and alienation. Ultimately, this research paper argues that these cinematic texts, though progressive in appearance, often reinscribe heteronormative and patriarchal anxieties, positioning trans women as symbolic vessels through which queer male desire can be explored, displaced, and ultimately denied.



Muhammad, IVS, Class of 2025. *Masculinity and Desire at the Tubewell*

Abstract:

The following essay is an analysis of a digital phenomenon that I will refer to as the 'tubewell swimming' videos. It consists of online content, usually in the form of videos, uploaded by male sex workers from rural Pakistan on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, but not just limited to them. This online content serves as a tool for the sex workers to market their services, which is usually performance-based sex work. My analysis of this online content aims to understand how intimacy, gender and sexuality are constructed and performed in these online spaces, consequently highlighting how various discourses around the body, gender and sexuality shape these performances.



Shahrez Chauhan,
University of Edinburgh,
Class of 2025. *Turning
Queer Lives into Art:
Aestheticising Queer
Subjectivity in the Mod-
ernist Literary Tradition*

Abstract:

This dissertation argues that the following queer modernist texts—Richard Bruce Nugent’s *Geisha Man* (1926), Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood* (1936)—each respectively illustrate an aesthetic preoccupation with cultivating life as a form of art. Through a comparative analysis of Kondo Gale Matzuika’s character in *Geisha Man*, Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs Dalloway*, and Frau Mann in *Nightwood*, my argument focuses on how Nugent, Woolf, and Barnes collectively engage in an aestheticisation of queer subjectivities that liken the queer self’s experiences of desire, of the body, of memory, and of the performance of identity to modes of artistic creation in their own right. By framing life, the process of living, and both the creation and the expression of queer subjectivities as an accumulation of aesthetic phenomena, the queer-life-as-art aesthetic I advocate for thus likens the self-conscious act of creating a life and a queer identity for oneself to the self-conscious act of creating a work of art. By outlining the ways in which queer modernists depict the living of queer lives as works of art, this dissertation then also paves the way for further research connecting literary movements that we think of as queer (such as modernism and fin-de-siècle aestheticism) but that we don’t traditionally consider the resonances between.



Group Photos



Gallery



Gallery



Gallery



Gallery

