

The L-shaped House in Tulamba

Farrukh Addnan

The L-shaped house in my village, Tulamba, holds a special place in my heart. It is not just a structure but it is deeply connected with my being. It's as if the blood in my veins flows directly through its walls.

The village's name has its origins from Raja Talman and is a historic town located in the Khanewal district of Southern Punjab. Whenever I think back to the time I spent in that house, I am transported to moments of comfort and familiarity—it is like reliving the days when I felt most at ease.

Opposite the house are remains of the old city—the ruins of Tulamba. These remains carry a grand and majestic aura, even though they are generally in a state of disrepair due to neglect and exposure to rain. Despite their current state one can still see some semblance of brick formations, providing a glimpse into their past glory.

For the inhabitants of Tulamba, these ruins stand as witness to all we have undergone—a testament to our history and struggles. Affectionately referred to as *bhir*,[¶] these mounds predate us and will endure beyond us. Growing up amidst them was at times intimidating because of their sheer magnitude and their coarse, washed out presence, yet they also held the promise of exhilaration and delight. Especially on rainy days, they transformed into an impromptu playground for me and other youngsters in the village. We slid down channels carved by rainwater. The ruins became our sanctuary, a place where we discovered joy in an environment where dedicated playgrounds were scarce.

For me, the narrative of this place has been deeply influenced by many aspects of nature. I can still vividly recall the robust mud walls that encompass the city, the ancient trees that have witnessed the passage of time, and the murmur of water flowing through the nearby canal. This interaction between natural and human forces has shaped Tulamba's terrain and left a lasting mark on its identity. The weathering and erosion of man-made structures by natural elements such as wind, rain, and sunlight serve as a poignant reminder of the land's transformative

[¶] mound

capabilities. Likewise, over time, these abandoned and neglected structures became seamlessly integrated with the natural landscape, overgrown with various forms of vegetation. It is not uncommon for the current inhabitants of Tulamba to stumble upon fragments of shattered pottery amidst the ruins. During one of my walks, I too encountered numerous shards of pottery adorned with intricate designs made of dashes and dots. I longed to learn more about each fragment of shattered crockery, every indication of past human activity, the myths and hidden narratives beneath layers of dirt.

Stitching Memories

As a child I was only allowed to play outside for a few hours a day and spending more time inside the house piqued my curiosity about my surroundings. This imposed confinement shifted my focus to the objects within the four surrounding walls. It made me more observant, encouraging me to seek out something new every time I looked around. As a result, even the simplest things evoked my curiosity.

My aunts and other relatives would often work on intricate embroidery projects. They would work together, skillfully bringing complex patterns to life on fabric. They embroidered using various techniques including *phulkari*, *charsuti tanka*, *shishakari* among others. I was fascinated by their artistry, so I would occasionally volunteer to help them out.

These collaborative moments introduced me to a novel way of engaging with my family. My creative energy found a home in stitching as I threaded needles and meticulously sewed with my aunts. I gained an appreciation for their perseverance and commitment to the craft, which I found truly beautiful. I was also particularly intrigued by the cultural significance that embroidery held and asked questions about the patterns, motifs, and narratives that underpinned each artistic creation. The needlework made me happy and gave me a profound sense of purpose. In the grand scheme of things, those extended days spent within the confines of the home became a fertile breeding ground for my creativity.

My earliest memories are woven around the objects in my home. In the rectangular courtyard, my mother would stretch a wire, hanging up freshly washed clothing which would flutter gently in the breeze. On the other side, my grandfather's black Sohrab bicycle stood proudly, poised for its next adventure, sheltered by the towering southern wall. The bicycle with its bold black frame held me captive. Yet, it was the small seat he had affixed to the front bar that held

special meaning for me. That seat was exclusively for me as my grandfather dropped me off and picked me from school. We rode along, the bicycle's wheels spinning beneath us, carrying us forward through time and space. Every part of that bicycle held memories. On the right side of the handlebar there was a large bell, and adjacent to it was a smaller one which belonged to me. The soft ringing of those bells became the soundtrack to our journeys, symbolising not only our travels but also the cherished connection between my grandfather and me.

During the 1990s, another treasure graced our home—a bright red Panasonic tape player. The vibrant melodies of Bollywood tunes from that era could be heard on a sizable collection of cassettes that belonged to my father. I wasn't permitted to listen to them in the presence of my father, and my grandfather's response to anyone caught enjoying the tape recorder, including me, was '*Bund karo yeh kanjar khand*' or 'Stop this vulgarity.'

Reflecting back on these memories, it is clear how these seemingly trivial articles significantly influenced my childhood. They were much more than objects because they opened a realm of imagination, adventure, and familial connections.

Imagining the Past

As time went on, thinking back to the ruins made me wonder about their historical origins. My memories of them provoked many unanswered questions about the people who used to live there, the purpose of the structures, and the reasons for different civilisations' ultimate decline. Sparse research exists around Tulamba such as a few travelogues and unreliable websites. The ruins, though worn and weathered, still hint at a fort and a tower-like structure. Unfortunately, it is hard to fathom much more than this because of their significant deterioration. The ancient city is considered to be 2500 years old. According to popular belief, Tulamba faced repeated attacks by invading armies, including those led by Alexander and Timur, due to its strategic location by the Ravi river and along the route to Multan. Coins from different civilizations have been uncovered from earlier archaeological excavations and seem to suggest that the city held religious and political importance within its region.¹ It seems clear that Tulamba was a prosperous city, being located on a busy trade route.

I am in awe every time I hear about Tulamba's historical past where various faiths coexisted in harmony. The city was believed to be a meeting point for diverse customs and beliefs, and was home to a wide range of religious and cultural influences. Here, festivals, exchanges of

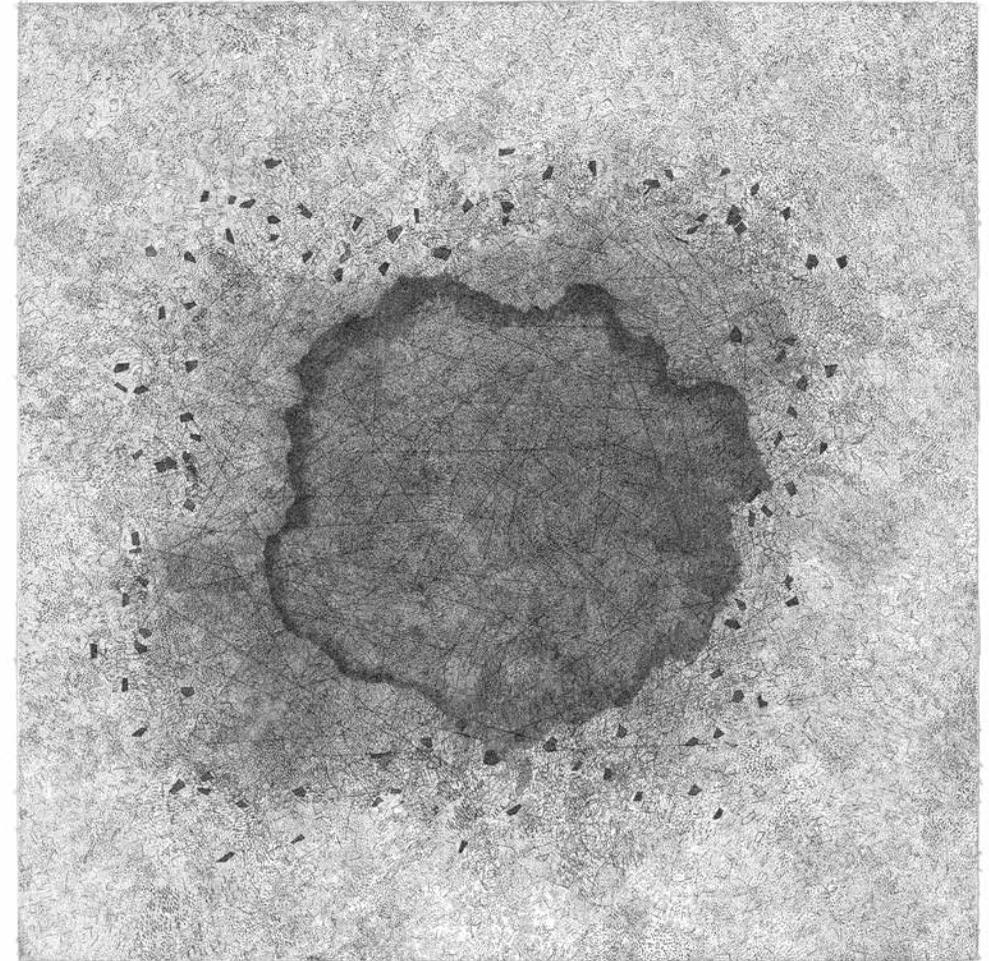
ideas, and shared values bridged religious boundaries. The present landscape paints a different picture—the dominance of a single religion that contrasts with the vibrant tapestry of the past where even until recently the long-standing coexistence of Sufi Islamic customs, Hindu rites, and other spiritual traditions was practised and celebrated. This shift makes me yearn for the inclusivity and tolerance that I believe characterised Tulamba’s history, which was perhaps once a true melting pot.

Weaving History, Folklore, and Artistry

As an artist, I took on a new approach to exploring the remains of the old town. My days were now filled with long walks and hours spent observing the ruins. I felt compelled to document my time there through photography and it became a way to capture details my eyes otherwise missed. In the photographs, the textures, interplays of light and shadow, and the often-overlooked details held my attention for hours. As I continued my documentation of the physical features of the ruins, I felt compelled to dig deeper. I wanted my work to reflect my connection to this place and this quest for a richer understanding guided me towards a new artistic direction—drawing.

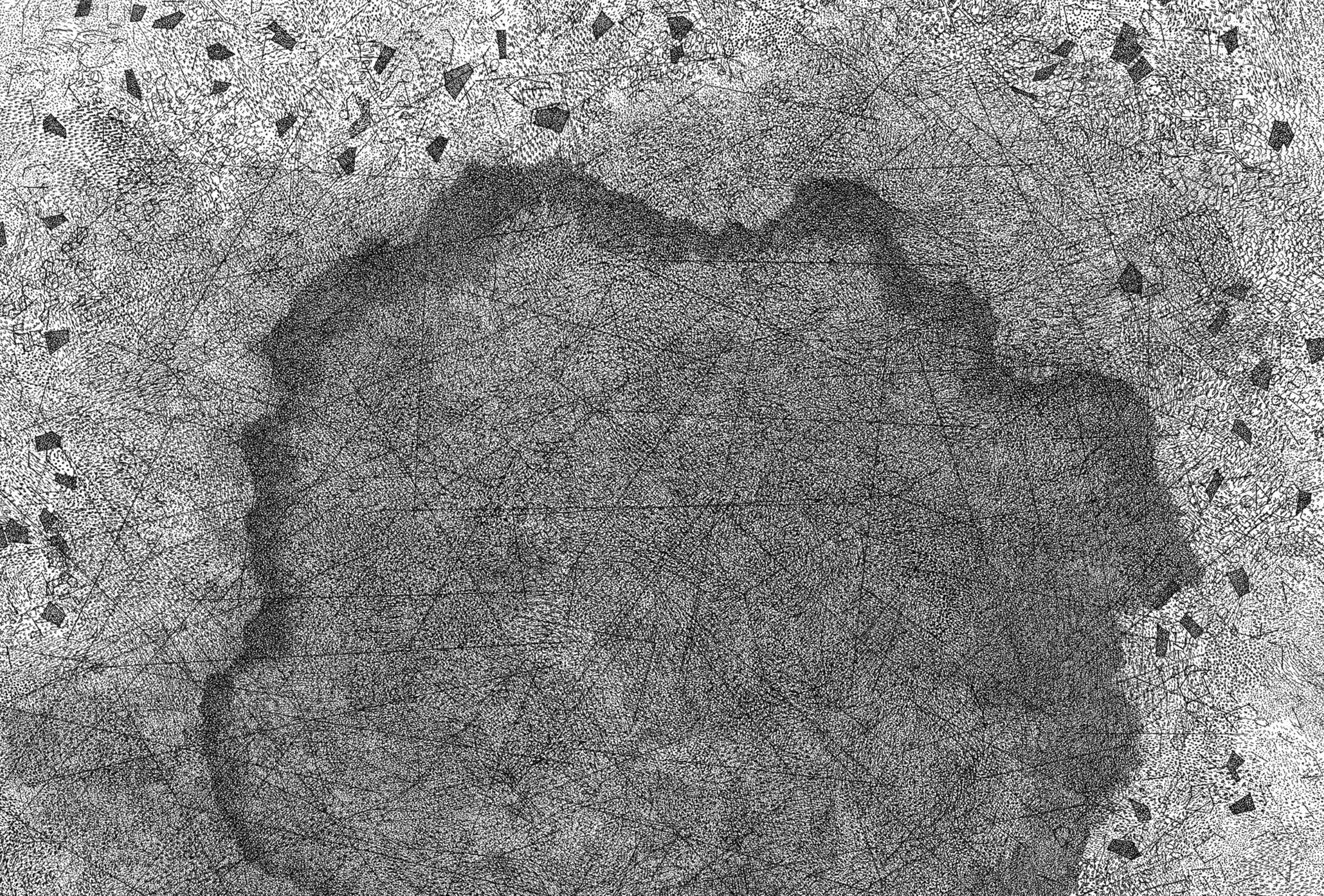
The initial inspiration for my drawings stemmed from my firsthand observations at the location: broken walls, weathered stones, and intriguing features concealed beneath the debris. However, as I diligently worked on these drawings, they transcended mere representations. They began to embody the very essence of the location, reflecting the anecdotes and stories I had collected. The drawings evolved into a celebration of the spirit of discovery and exploration, encapsulating my personal journey through the ruins, my interactions with the evolving narratives surrounding them, and my emotional attachment to the place.

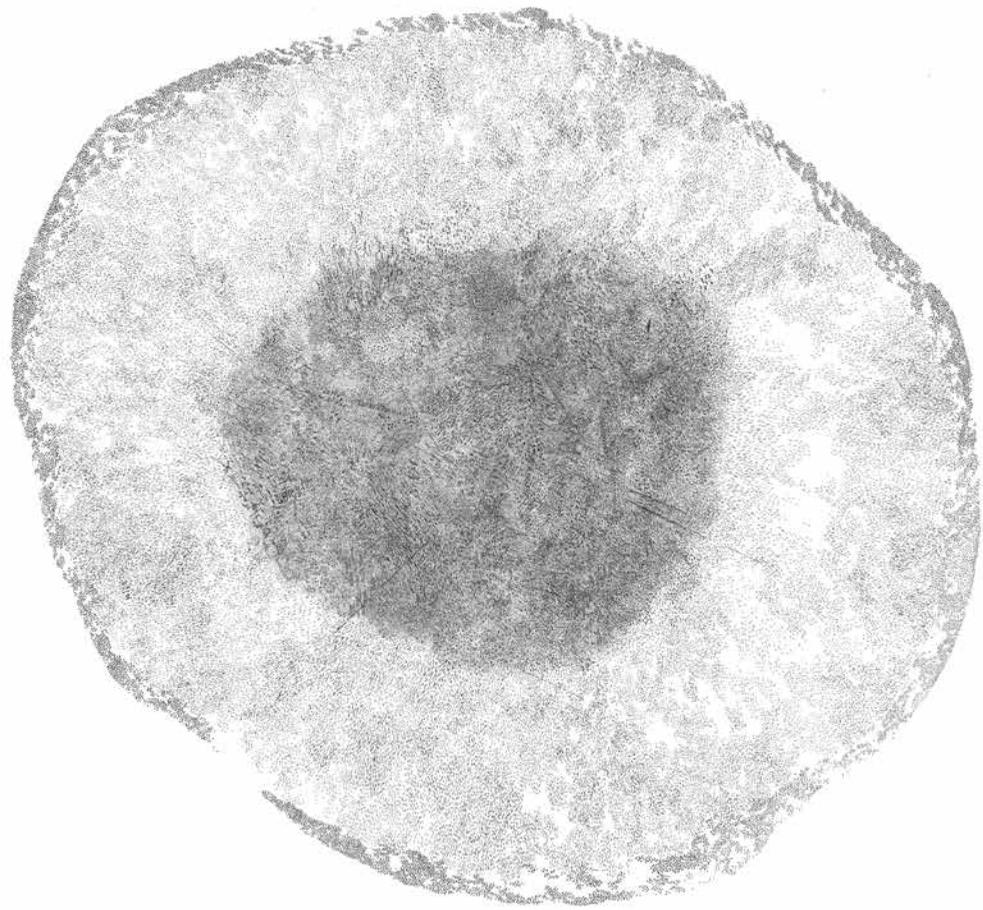
In essence, my drawings started to reference not only my visits and revisits but also my recollections of the space. On paper, I would initiate these drawings from a seemingly arbitrary point. These patterns, much like memories, started as incomplete and shifting, and gradually coalesced. Taking inspiration from linear motifs reminiscent of ancient designs, I aimed to make my drawings resemble scans and maps, as the most satisfactory way of portraying the complexity of everything that I have come to understand.



(Above) Farrukh Addnan, 2020, *Mind Map*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.

(Page 46-47) Detail of *Mind Map*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.

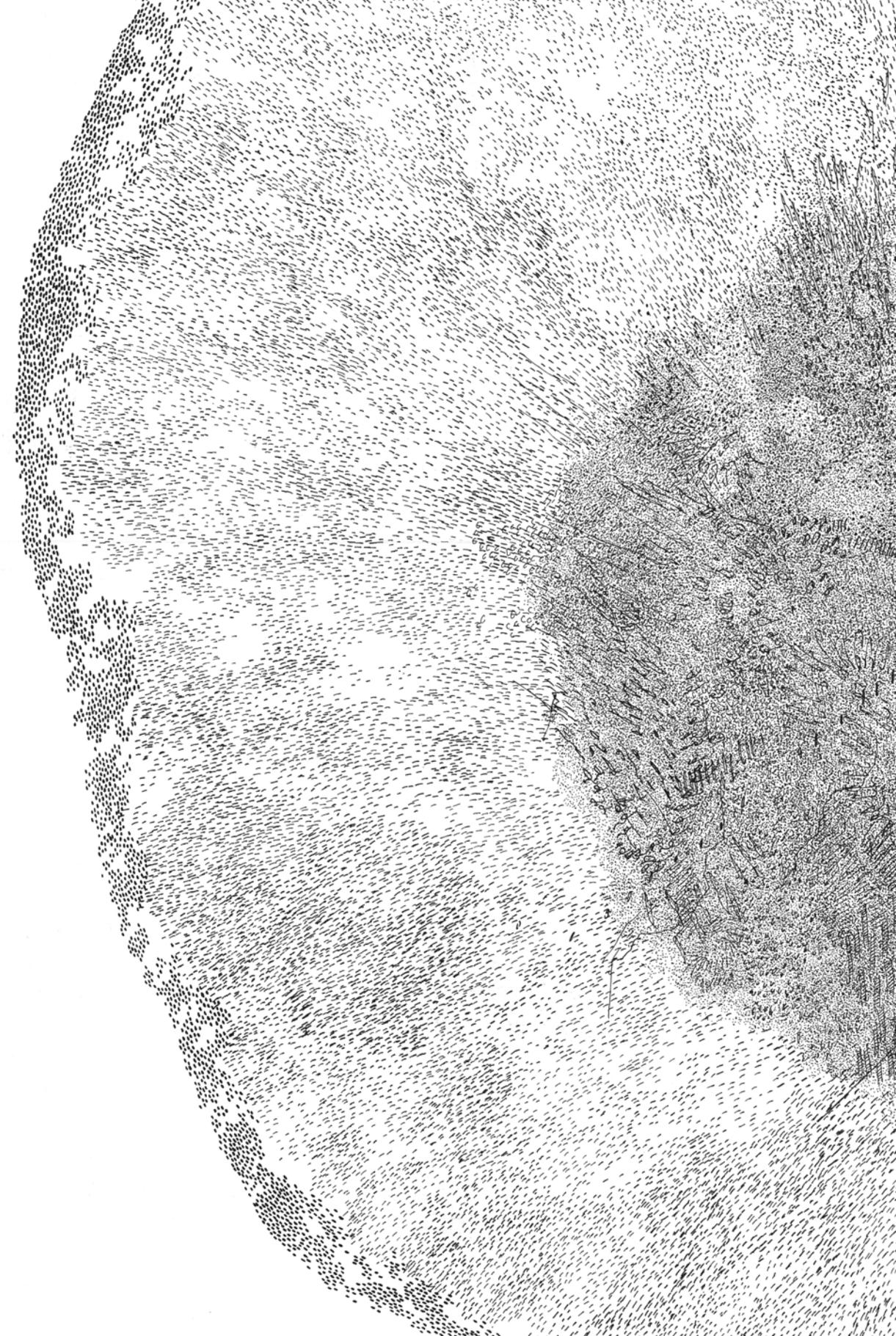




(Above) Farrukh Addnan, 2019, *Town*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.

(Right) Detail of *Town*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.

(Page 50-51) Farrukh Addnan, 2018, *Void Within II*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.







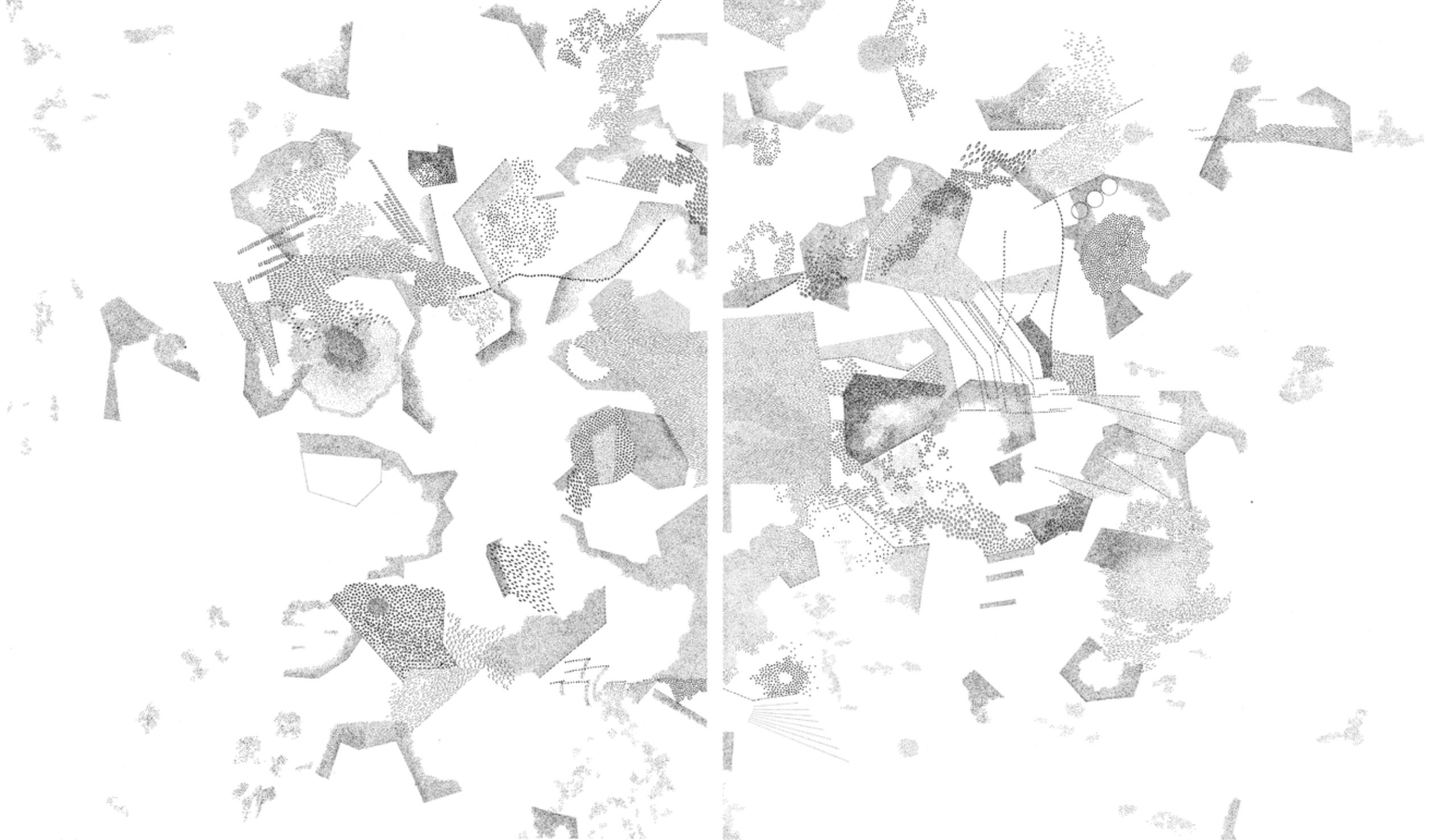
(Top) Farrukh Addnan, 2015, *Day, Night*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.

(Right) Detail of *Day, Night*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.



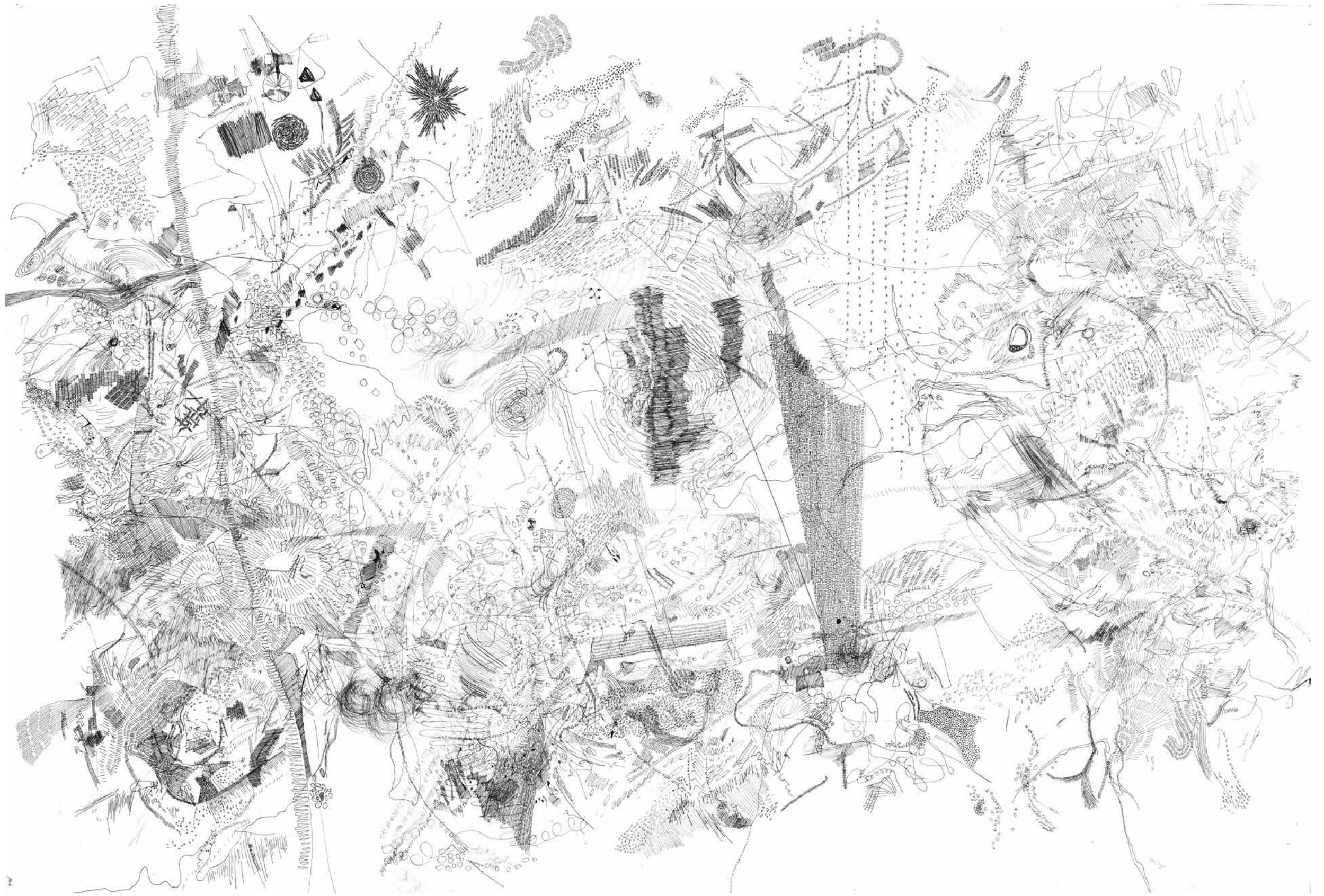


Farrukh Addnan, 2021, *Talmaan*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.



(Top) Farrukh Addnan, 2017, *Book of Memory*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.

(Page 58-59) Farrukh Addnan, 2013, *1000 narratives*, Pen and Ink on Canvas, Lahore.



Notes

1. "Important Places." District Khanewal. Accessed November 12, 2023.
<https://khanewal.punjab.gov.pk/important-places>.