

Lost in Translation

Artwork Information & Artist's Statement

Alia Haider

IBDP Visual Arts Student

2021 Visual Arts Prize Winner

The Friends' School

November 2021

Photographs: Alia Haider



Artist's Statement

From generational oppression to personal migration, this exhibition depicts the irreversible and deeply ingrained detriments of British Colonialism in the Indian Subcontinent. The true melancholy of colonisation resides not in the physical oppression, but in the gradual unfamiliarity of one's own culture. The notion that *your* culture is no longer recognisable, no longer *yours* is a haunting prospect. My works incorporate cultural objects and patterns – where their interactions imitate the interactions between the West and East. For I, myself, am a product of this relationship. The artists Shahzia Sikander and Julie Gough have been persistent and enduring influences on my work for this exhibition, as each artist utilises the dichotomy between the traditional and the contemporary to question the hypocrisy of power hierarchies such as the patriarchy and Colonial Australia.

The exhibition is divided into two distinct sections: the first being an attempt to explore the complex relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, and the second, to illuminate the often-obscured fluidity of culture. The divide and potential for co-existence is symbolically portrayed in the distinct patterns and colours – with all mediums and objects having specific connotations with respect to their “Eastern” or “Western” contexts. The red patterns and beading represent the blood of the Subcontinent, which runs through my veins, and the blue patterns and beading are that of the British and Australian Flag. Within each piece, the spatial arrangement of the colours and patterns depicts a possible relationship between the East and West. In some, the blue is domineering, and the red submissive. In others, they co-exist in equilibrium. The navy-blue ink used in the fabric printing overshadows the red, reminding the audience that whilst independence was gained, the detriments of colonisation still linger and corrupt – a relentless and persistent reality.



#1. *Oriental Aspirations*

2020. Beading, Posca Pens, Acrylic Paints and Riso Printing on Found Ceramics (27.5 x 20 cm).

Oriental Aspirations draws inspiration from chinoiserie: a decorative style in Western art characterised by the use of Chinese motifs and techniques. Popular in the 18th century, chinoiserie was considered exotic and oriental by the elite – a form of hypocrisy; the civilisation which they degraded was that which they simultaneously stole from and romanticised. Similarly, *Oriental Aspirations* looks at the manipulation of the minority as a means of gaining and

sustaining power. The faces of Zia-ul-haq (a former Pakistani Dictator) and Benazir Bhutto (a former Pakistani Prime Minister) are a reminder of the prevalence of such power imbalance within the Subcontinent itself.



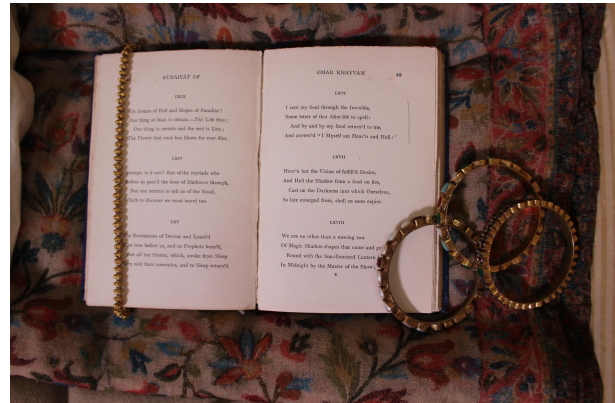


#2. Yaadon Ka Dher (Bundle of Memories)

2021. Assorted Objects in a Found Suitcase (46.5 x 70.0 x 21.5 cm)

Yaadon Ka Dher poses the question: *if you had to encompass your entire existence in a 1 x 1 metre box, what would you take?* A suitcase holds within it the physical necessities of life: clothes, shoes, toothbrush. Yet, often our most prized possession are our relationships, sense of community, or the smell of the rain in monsoon season: intangible sensations. Each object in this

suitcase serves a nostalgic purpose. The rosary reminds me of my grandmother, the jewellery of my aunties, the Quran of my community, and the photographs of the life we left behind.





#3. *Diyar-e-Goom (Lost Land)*

2021. Glass and Plastic Beading on Lino-Printed and Plain Calico, with Woven Photographs on Embroidery Hoops (52 x 48 cm).

Diyar-e-Goom acknowledges fluidity: the fluidity of time, culture and Self. The woven portraiture serves to provide an illusory sense of motion, of movement and change. The images from my childhood and beyond

acknowledge the role of the past in shaping our present and future; and that of colonisation on my homeland. Furthermore, the co-existence of the blue and red flowers symbolises the true nature of culture: that it is dependent upon one's own ability to embrace ambiguity, eventually making one's own, individual culture. Consequently, *Diyar-e-Goom* invites the audience to reflect upon the rigid and segregated connotation around the word "culture".



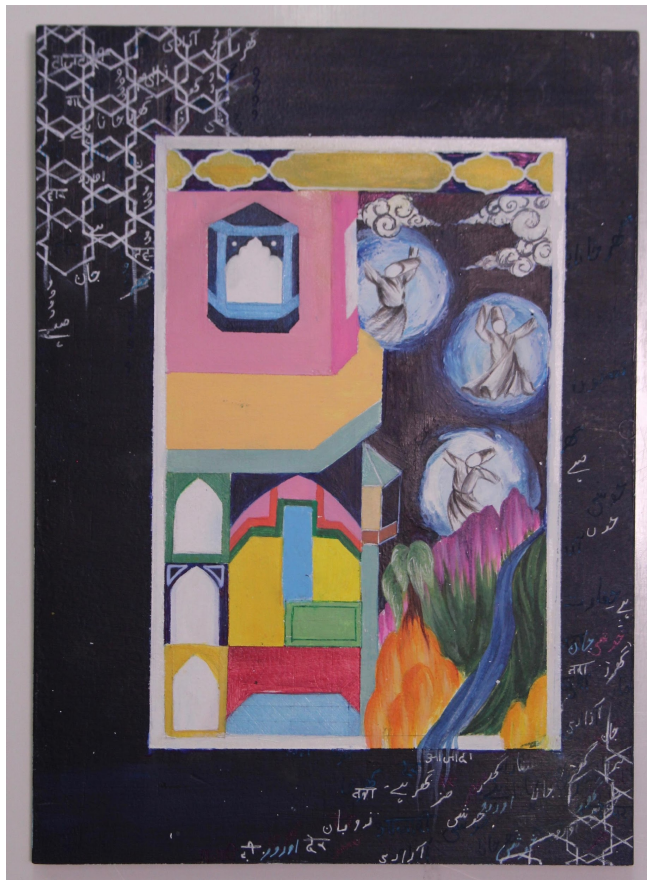


#4. *Anaarkali Bazaar*

2021. Linoleum Prints made with Oil-based Ink on Calico (155.5 x 55 cm)

Anaarkali is infamous in Pakistani folklore. Her illicit relationship with a prince sometime in the 1st century AD, saw her death by enclosure (being buried alive). That is, superficially, her story. In reality, the romanticised tale neglects the role of power in her silencing and degradation by the Mughal Empire. Thus, *Anaarkali Bazaar* provides the audience with an interactive experience in a typical Pakistani Bazaar. Instead of selling fabric, I sell my culture. I put it on display, letting it be entrapped by the blue Australian patterns, and also by the audience themselves. It presents the tragic surrender of one's culture in the face of a 'superior', powerful nation





#5. *Lost in Translation*

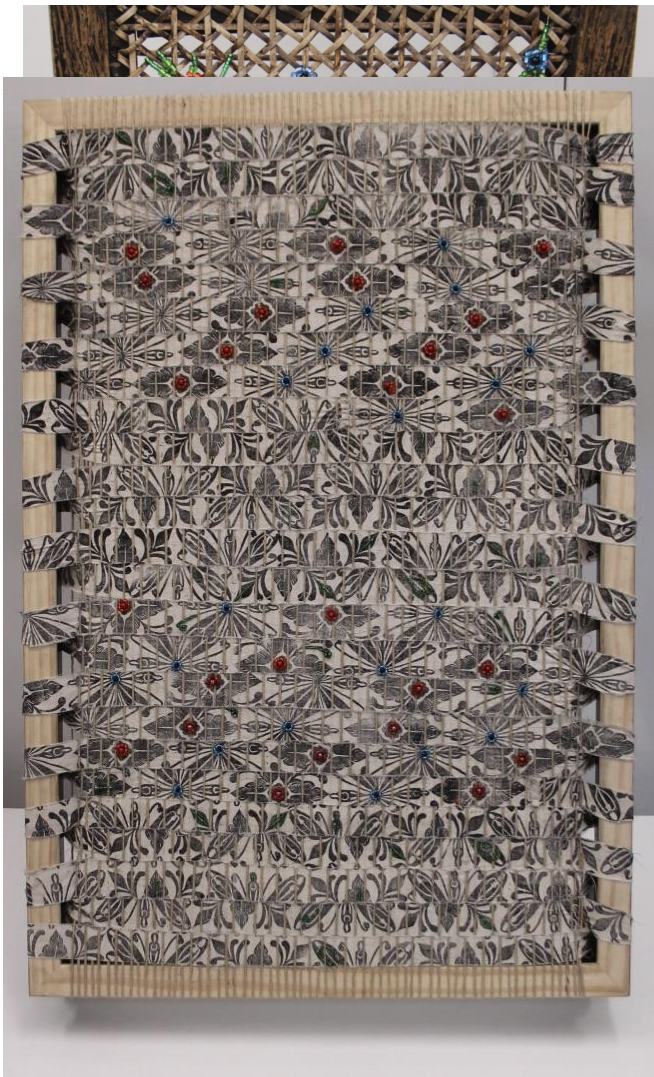
2020. Acrylic Paint, Posca and Gel Pens on Plywood
(37 x 23.5 cm)

Lost in Translation depicts the progression of South Asian attitudes towards the West – elucidating an often-overlooked detriment of colonisation: love and hate for the coloniser. Whilst colonisation no doubt caused inexplicable unrest, it created a paradoxical relationship between the colonisers and the colonised. To this day, the East looks to the West in awe, readily disposing of their culture, language and appearance: a futile attempt to

reclaim and become what colonialism so easily took from them. Thus, *Lost in*



distinction, but a moral and cognitive one.



#7. *Dreaming for the Damned*

2021. Glass and Plastic Beading on Lino-printed Calico, woven onto a Wood-coated Metal Table Frame with Found Legs (61.5 x 91.5 x 20 cm).

In a Year 9 essay on the myths and misconceptions of immigration, I wrote: “...immigration is a test for those willing to take it, it tests the

willingness of one to give up their culture and assimilate into other. The ultimate test, however, is whether one believes that the Australian Dream is worthier than its reality.” *Dreaming for the Damned* is a Charpai: a woven bed used throughout the

Subcontinent. This bed features the perennial red and blue dichotomy evident in the exhibition atop my woven and intertwined patterns – a symbol for the fluidity and simultaneous rigidity of culture.



#8. Ttooqrein (Debris)

2021. Posca Pens, Spray Paint, Beading and Assorted Photographs on Coke Cans (46.5 x 77 cm).

Cans are such that their production is extensive, and their use ephemeral. They are bought for cheap, their contents are consumed, and they are simply thrown away. Personally, I believe their function mimicks the nature of colonialism and disposable culture. The coloniser occupies, kills, loots, and leaves – and the immigrant arrives, assimilates and throws away their culture to adopt a new. In both cases, something is lost, something is gained, and someone is irreversibly left hollow. Consequently, these cans are all decorated with pictures and symbols of Pakistan,

displayed upon a disposable vessel – a modern twist to the traditional urns and ceramics one would expect.





#9. *Bulleh ki Jaana mai*

Qon

2021. Lino and Riso-Printing upon Glass Beaded Calico (30 x 44.5 x 6 cm).

The infamous line “Bulleh ki jaana mai qon” is derived from the Kafi poems of Bulleh Shah, a Punjabi philosopher and poet. The line is an expression of the poet’s lack of self and identity, where Bulleh states “How would Bulleh know who I am”. In a similar way, this piece is a self-written poem detailing my immigration story and the entrenched role of colonisation in its initiation. Presented in the form of a

biblical illuminated manuscript, its antique look aims to illustrate the transcendental and perennial nature of migration, movement and cultural change.

