

62
MINUTES
WITH
MOHAMMAD
ALI TALPUR

Volume 2, Book 1
CONVERSATIONS WITH
CONTEMPORARY PAKISTANI ARTISTS
A Publication by Vasl Artists' Association

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Vasl Artists' Association

About the Series

Vasl Artists' Association presents its second volume of Artists' Books – [Conversations with Contemporary Pakistani Artists](#).

These series of publications are one of Vasl's many initiatives to connect with the wider community through contemporary arts. These bring forth and document emerging artists and their dialogues with society in their critical practices. Through transcribed conversations between the artists and the interviewer, we hope our readers will gain an insight into their training, studio spaces, creative struggles and negotiations with the constraints of being a contemporary artist in present day Pakistan. The journey of these successful, prolific, mid career artists is also reflective of the era in which art and technology are reshaping perceptions and experiences. We hope that their perspectives would benefit the younger generation of artists and students.

Vasl has directed the editing and designing of each book to be reflective of the selected artists' personalities and their work. Included in these books are images of research, sketches and personal anecdotes that lend these books a more approachable tone. In this ongoing publication project, Vasl aims to include more conversations with Pakistani artists in the future.

Mohammad Ali Talpur: I feel very weird if someone interviews me, but on the other hand, I myself have conducted many interviews with artists. I make video documentaries; I have taken several interviews, including Salima Hashmi¹, Intizar Hussain², Quddus Mirza³, Rashid Rana⁴, Adeela Suleman⁵ and Naiza Khan⁶. It's basically inspired by the Art21⁷ documentaries and I still have to edit these interviews, but the primary purpose is to discuss diverse practices. So far I have taken around 20 interviews and I want to get screened at IVS⁸, NCA⁹, and BNU¹⁰ for art students.

Vasl: So you think this is because right now you are a part of academia or is this something that, you think, is missing from art education?

Mohammad Ali: I'm from a generation that came before YouTube. In the first year of NCA in 1994, there wasn't any YouTube, so we used to hear narrations of an interview from a cassette. So if there is a talk between, let's say, Quddus Mirza and Rashid Rana, there is a very interesting dialogue between them, so I always had this urge to somehow save all these moments somewhere. Of course, now I can do that with modern technology. Then there were Sabeen Gillani¹¹ and Nazish Attaullah¹². So what a teacher does? Their job is to help the student if the student is stuck somewhere. A teacher always finds a simple and an easy way to teach their students in a way that they finish their two years work in six months. So I am always inspired from my teachers, Zahoor¹³ Sahab¹⁴ was also there, but he did not teach me.

1) Salima Hashmi internationally recognized visual artist based in Lahore, Pakistan.

2) Intizar Hussain was a Pakistani writer of Urdu novels, short stories, poetry and nonfiction.

3) Quddus Mirza internationally recognized visual artist, art critic and art writer based in Lahore, Pakistan.

4) Rashid Rana internationally recognized visual artist based in Lahore, Pakistan.

5) Adeela Suleman internationally recognized visual artist based in Karachi, Pakistan.

6) Naiza Khan internationally recognized visual artist based in Karachi, Pakistan.

7) Art21 is a nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring a more creative world through the works and words of contemporary artists.

8) IVS Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture located in Karachi, Pakistan.

9) NCA National College of Arts located in Lahore, Pakistan.

10) BNU Beaconhouse National University located in Lahore, Pakistan.

11) Sabeen Gilani

12) Nazish Attaullah internationally recognized visual artist based in Lahore, Pakistan.

13) Zahoor ul Akhlaq was famous for his paintings, sculptures, design and architecture, as well as his teaching at the NCA in Lahore.

14) Sahab is a form of address or title placed after a man's name or designation, used

Vasl: And how many years have you been teaching for?

Mohammad Ali: I started teaching painting and drawing in the Fine Art Department at NCA in 2004.

Vasl: When you first came to NCA for your bachelors, did you always know that you are going to be an artist?



Mohammad Ali: When I got admission, I did not know things politically. I think there are many people who have no idea about these things and most of them are from Hyderabad, Faisalabad, Mirpurkhas -you will not find any art education in these places. From Hyderabad there is one artist Ahmed Ali Manganhar¹⁵. I saw his drawing for the first time and I felt like it's some kind of magic. It was a black sheet and he made a drawing with oil pastels. It was my first interaction with art, and I just felt like as if it was magic. All I knew was that I wanted to learn it and do it. I was in Class 10. Before that I used to see all these things on television, Mansoor Rahi¹⁶ used to make things, but you cannot see things very clearly on a TV. And when you hold a drawing in your hand, you see the

as a mark of respect.

¹⁵⁾ Ahmed Ali Manganhar internationally recognized visual artist based in Lahore, Pakistan.

¹⁶⁾ Mansoor Rahi is a renowned Pakistani abstractionist painter.

texture and its colors, you see things differently. Ahmed Ali Manganhar used to work in his brother's painting shop, he used to sit there and work as a sign board painter. I went to him for a few days, then he said to me, 'I learned this from someone, you should learn it from him too' (laughs). Then I went with him to Hyderabad to the place where he learnt drawing from. I went there for two years and I really enjoyed it.

Vasl: Who was your teacher?

Mohammad Ali: Abdul Fatah Halepoto¹⁷. He taught us drawing, he used to say that we should learn from a photograph, so we used to observe nature and other things. We used to work the whole week and work in our sketchbooks. And when our teacher checked our sketchbooks, he always had a different sign - if he liked anything he had a different sign and if he did not, his sign was different. After learning this I went to Karachi for the admission test for NCA, and that place, I think, was somewhere near Karachi University¹⁸. I had this thing in my mind that the NCA would be like this and that and we'll discuss Michelangelo¹⁹ and the whole time we will make drawings and paintings (laughs). I had a highly romanticized opinion of it. But when I went to NCA, on the first Monday of the week we were drafting, making mechanical drawings, and then we also had a design class, we made a color wheel, and then sculpture, and I didn't have any interest in these things.

Vasl: Isn't it interesting because now it is your work (laughs)?

Mohammad Ali: (laughs) Yes! We also had theory classes, and it was all very boring. I did not enjoy the first year of college, I really didn't understand anything in the first semester.

Vasl: And what was your student work like?

Mohammad Ali: We used to make still life. I was more focused on drawing. I had a very slow understanding in learning, understanding the perspective was very hard for me, but I had to do it. Then

¹⁷⁾ Abdul Fatah Halepoto is a renowned Pakistani artist based in Hyderabad, Pakistan.

¹⁸⁾ The University of Karachi is a public university located in Karachi, Pakistan.

¹⁹⁾ Michaelangelo was an Italian sculptor, painter, architect and poet of the High Renaissance, who exerted an unparalleled influence on the development of Western art.

I had this in my mind that I have to keep working and make as much as I can. But then our teachers used to say, ‘Okay, I’ve seen this, now make something new’.

there are some people who understand things very easily. Unfortunately, I was not one of those students. I had less understanding, but I used to work every-day very patiently. I was very reluctant about this because I had to keep working. And then in college you have to make something new. I had this in my mind that I have to keep working and make as much as I can. But then our teachers used to say, ‘Okay, I’ve seen this, now make something new’. Then I don’t know after second year, things gradually changed.

Vasl: And after graduation what was your first job?

Mohammad Ali: I graduated in 1998 and there was nothing to do in Hyderabad, so I had already decided that I’ll either move to Karachi or Lahore. Then I got a job in Lahore and I designed a few sets in Lahore for private TV channels, Audio Visual Communication (AVC). After that I started teaching at Lahore Grammar School (LGS)²⁰ as a drawing teacher. Then one day Quddus Mirza came and met me and offered me a job at NCA, and I was already working at LGS, but NCA was a better option for me. Then he told me that he is going to India and he wanted me to take painting classes in his absence. Then the NCA masters’ program started in 2000 - MA honors visual arts. Lala Rukh²¹ was the director of this program. I did my Masters because I wanted to start working again.

Vasl: How do you think your Masters’ education helped you further your career?

Mohammad Ali: I feel the Masters helped a lot because when I was doing my undergrad I could not understand a lot of things. I could not see things critically, but I was not very aware of my language. You know it was just like, that when you have a lot

²⁰) Lahore Grammar School (LGS) is a group of private based preparatory institutions based in the city of Lahore, Pakistan.

²¹) Lala Rukh was a prominent Pakistani women rights activist and artist who was known as a founder of Women’s Action Forum.

of energy, but you are skipping a lot of things. So in the Masters program Lala Rukh’s goal was to focus on the South Asian art scene. They used to conduct a lot of seminars and lectures on practitioners of different disciplines. I was very inspired by Jackson Pollock²², Willem de Kooning²³, Jasper Johns²⁴...

Vasl: Do you think these artists still inspire you in your work?

Mohammad Ali: No, not anymore. When I was doing my Masters’ Lala Rukh told me a few things which made me think very differently, we were looking at different possibilities.

Vasl: The work that you were making during your Bachelors, how did that change with your Masters?

Mohammad Ali: Actually, when I was doing my Masters, my work was a little different than what I was doing in my undergrad. During that time I was interested in painting a cinema poster, collages, and film actors

because our lectures were based on South Asian art. It was all too much for me because from the beginning we used to make figures and oil paintings. After completing my Master’s degree, I started thinking of what will I do next. If I’ll do this maybe someone has

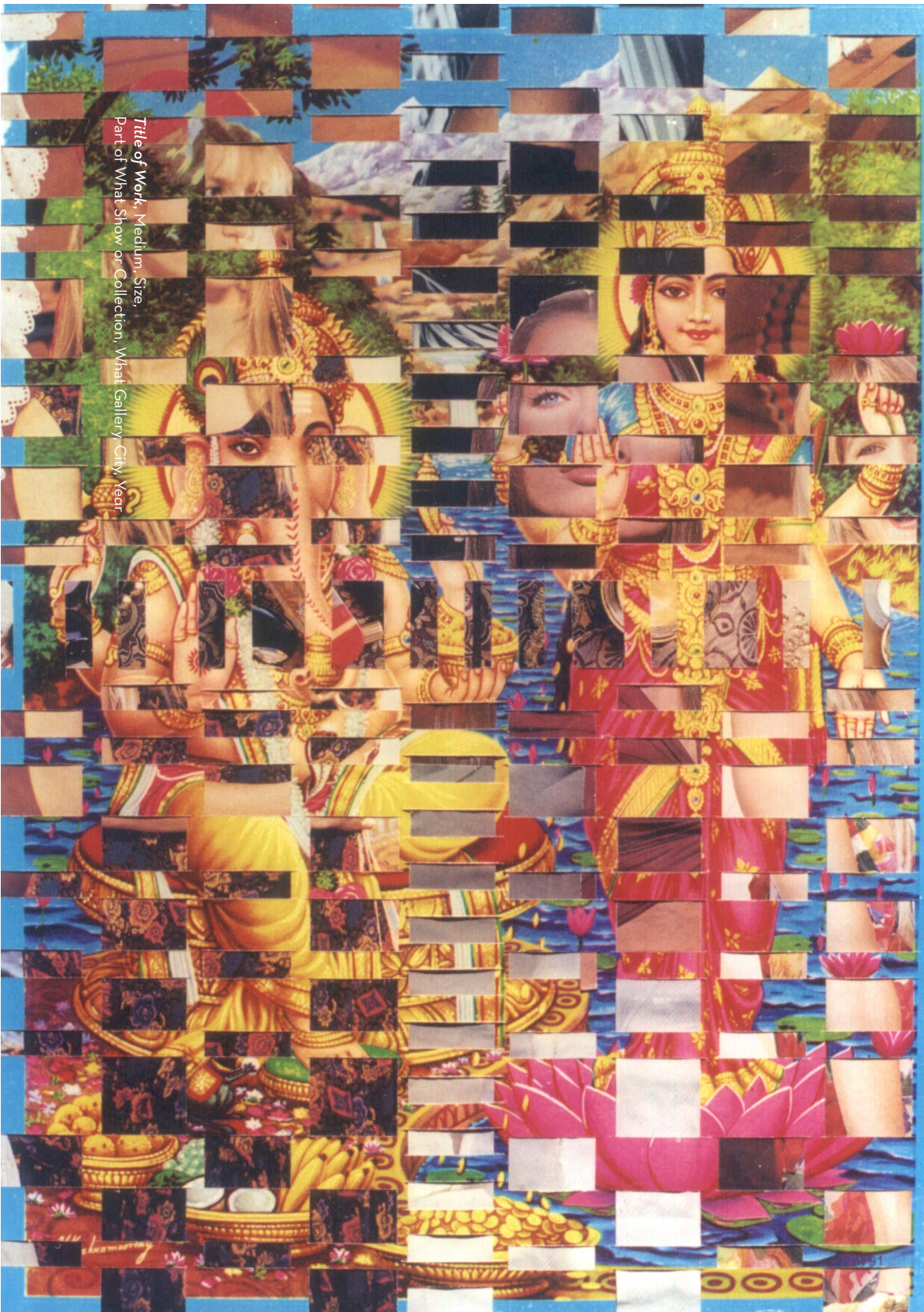


Title of Work, Medium, Size, Part of What Show or Collection, What Gallery, City, Year

²²) Paul Jackson Pollock was an American painter and a major figure in the abstract expressionist movement.

²³) Willem de Kooning was a Dutch American abstract expressionist artist.

²⁴) Jasper Johns is an American painter, sculptor and printmaker whose work is associated with abstract expressionism, Neo-Dada, and pop art.



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after completing my master's degree, i started thinking of **what will i do next.** if i'll do this maybe someone has already done it in the past. if i'm making a figure, saeed akhtar makes figures. i used to think about all of these things. **how will i make my identity?** something that defines me.



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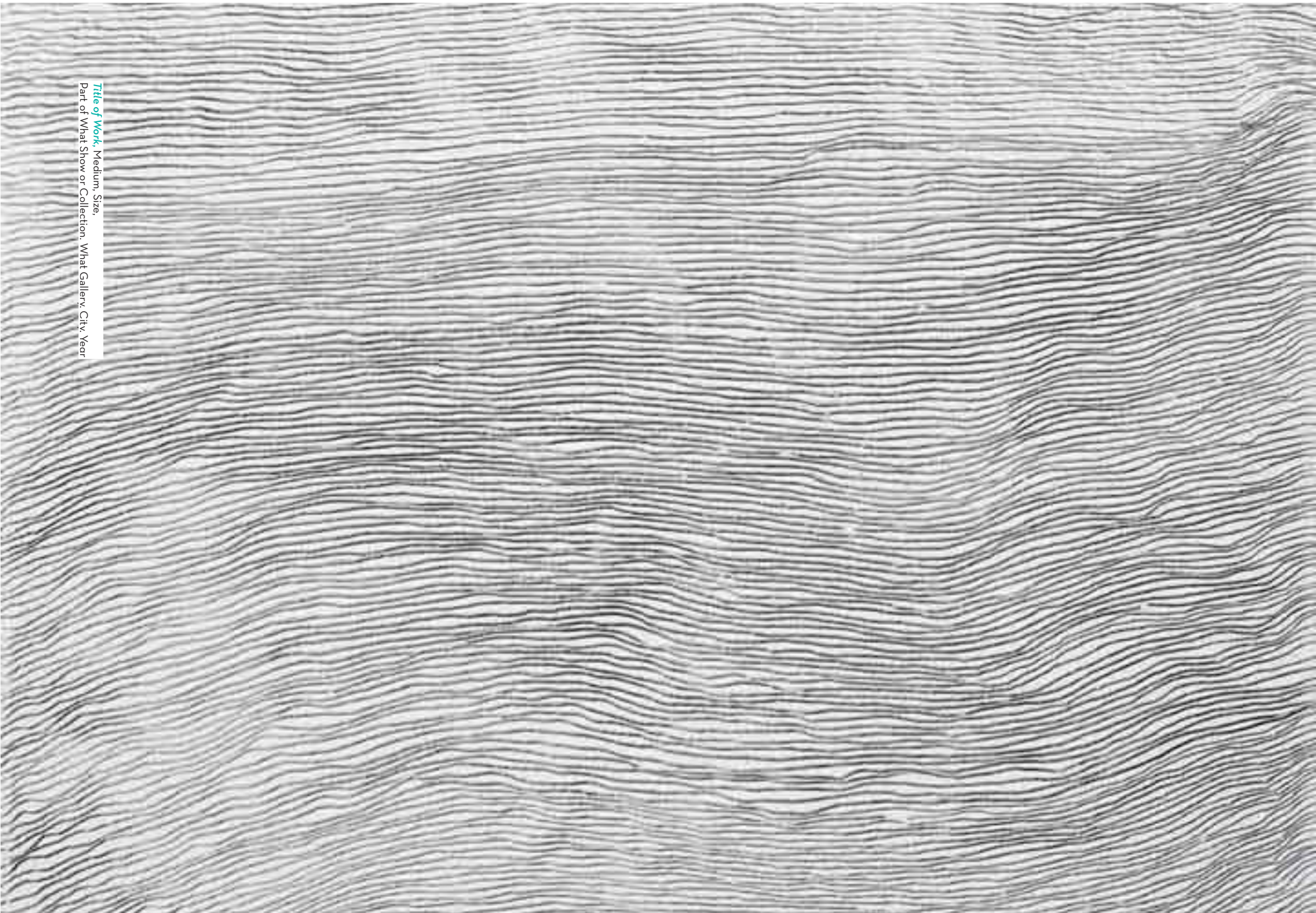
already done it in the past. If I'm making a figure, Saeed Akhtar²⁵ makes figures. I used to think about all of these things. How will I make my identity? Something that defines me. I kept thinking and I kept practicing and then I stopped working. And at that time my understanding was different than what it is right now. I was in so much pressure. During the Masters program, musicians, calligraphers and dancers used to come for lectures and I felt that somehow I have to manage time, so why not music. And then I started making

patterns in my sketchbook. In Lahore, I used to stay in Rashid Rana's studio. One day, I was sitting and working, I was actually drawing an eagle on the kite (picture), and it was looking very interesting and I was enjoying it, and all the drawing practice, I did in Hyderabad, I could see that in my drawing, and I never looked at the paper I just followed the bird which was flying, sometimes it was hiding behind the trees, sometimes behind the architecture, and whenever it hid somewhere I just stopped working. I could not understand why I was doing that, I just kept working. And I used to do that every day, I worked 4 to 5 hours, each drawing was made in 2 minutes. Someone told me to look at this white artist's work and I saw, it was very interesting. After that I took a blank sheet and kept thinking and I did not want to go into politics because I just felt that everyone was making very political work. I mean people do have a concept in their work, but as compared to Western Art they are more focused on the concept of their work. For example, in Pakistan we have a calligrapher, what can you do in calligraphy that can make it not look political, and then miniature painting which is completely different. I thought maybe I should go into crafts because I want to do something different. So I took a white surface and I drew

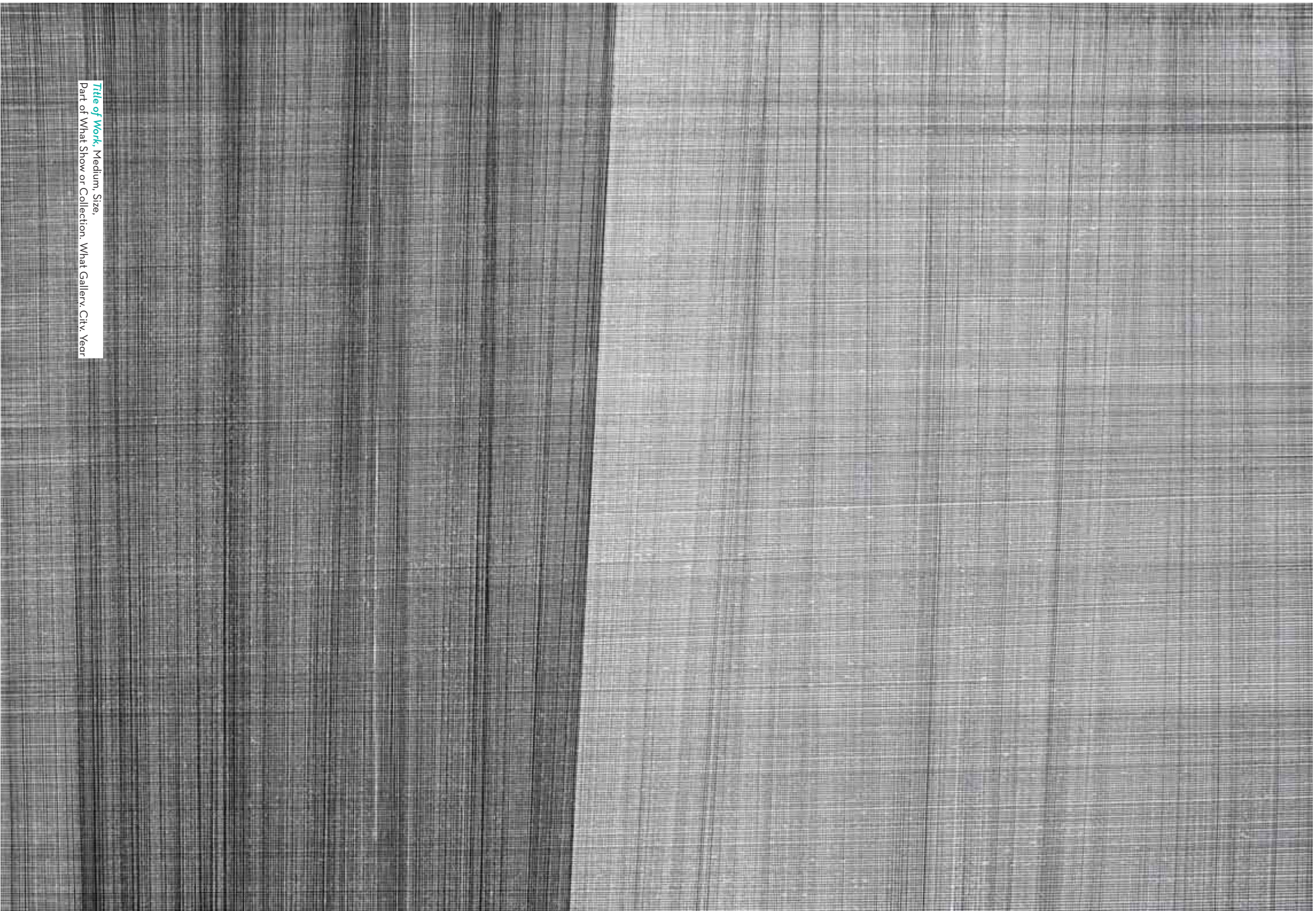
lines on top of it, I took a 20 x 30 inch sheet and completed half of the sheet in almost four hours and the rest of the sheet I completed the next day. First, it was a straight line, because I do freehand so by the next day when I'm working with about 600 lines, one of the lines will get a minor curve.

²⁵) Saeed Akhtar is a famous Pakistani artist based in Lahore, Pakistan.





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Vasl: It sounds like this process was a way for you to clear your mind?

Mohammad Ali: It did clear my mind, but I was more focused on filling each and every space on the paper, I just had to make the paper black with lines, later those curves looked like a wave on the paper. It also gave an impression of human hair, I wasn't doing it deliberately, I liked it because it looked very interesting. When you are working you take time to understand things. This was the series... (pictures) I think I made it in a cross form, I worked on both sides, this was, 'He can spare'. (picture)

Vasl: But it can look like anything, it can look like water, it can look like a bush.....

Mohammad Ali: I was looking at the South Asian Art which is about making an illustration. What I wanted to make, was that I did not want to make an actual figure, but I wanted to make the spirit of that figure. And that's how all the sensibility comes into my work, it can be a calligraphy, or a Kathak dancer, so I wanted to capture that in my work.

Vasl: This came out from your music practice?

Mohammad Ali: Overall practice. I was looking at the sensibility of South Asian art, the core essence of it. Recently, I've been thinking to stop doing this work. I feel the break is very important; I had a show last year in December or maybe in January in London, Austin Desmond Gallery²⁶. Now I think maybe I should start working like I used to do in the first year and it will come naturally to me. I remember in 2008 or 2009 I started learning calligraphy from Ustaad Gohar Qalam²⁷ in Lahore for two years. It's very hard, but I feel if you understand the perspective, drawing is far easier than calligraphy, maybe both are equally difficult, but I felt calligraphy is more difficult. So my teacher used to write 'alif', 'bay', 'jeem'²⁸ on the top and I used to copy it.

²⁶) Austin Desmond Fine Art located in London, UK.

²⁷) Khurshid Gohar Qalam internationally recognized Pakistani calligrapher based in Lahore, Pakistan.

²⁸) Alif, bay, jeem are the Urdu language alphabets.

Vasl: If you don't mind me asking what have you written here?

Mohammad Ali: 'I'm not responsible'. (Picture) I will tell you what's going on over here. When I was learning this I used to think about it in the same way as I do about drawing - what should I write? If I am writing that, 'I am going to Karachi because Vasil is taking my interview', so I will have to put in a lot of effort to write this. I felt like I needed to think about what I should write in it. I turned on the radio, I could hear the news, cricket commentary, and music and I started hearing those words and I could see the sound coming out of the radio. So I started transforming the sound into calligraphy, anything that is coming out of the radio transmission. After it all finished, I needed something else, continuously the sound was coming out of the radio and I kept writing. I started saying that it's not calligraphy, it's radiography, but then I realized that radiography sounds a lot like radiology²⁹ (laughs). While I was learning calligraphy I realized what my teacher did, he writes Quranic verses and poetry, and I felt that it was limiting me because a random person especially a foreigner won't be able to relate to it. So I thought I should transform the barrier, into something that is more relatable. I wanted to remove the identity of the text, so the visual becomes universal, which anyone can see and understand, so whenever I do calligraphy I use very casual text.

Vasl: This reminds me of a blind reading?

Mohammad Ali: Yes, it was made with a grid and all the dots are counted, now when you see the empty spaces in this work you will feel the absence and presence in this work (picture). You are right; it does remind you of a blind reading. And when I see it, I feel like it's a translation of something from one language to another.

Vasl: You also participated in Vasil's first Taaza Tareen³⁰?

Mohammad Ali: (Laughs) In 2004.

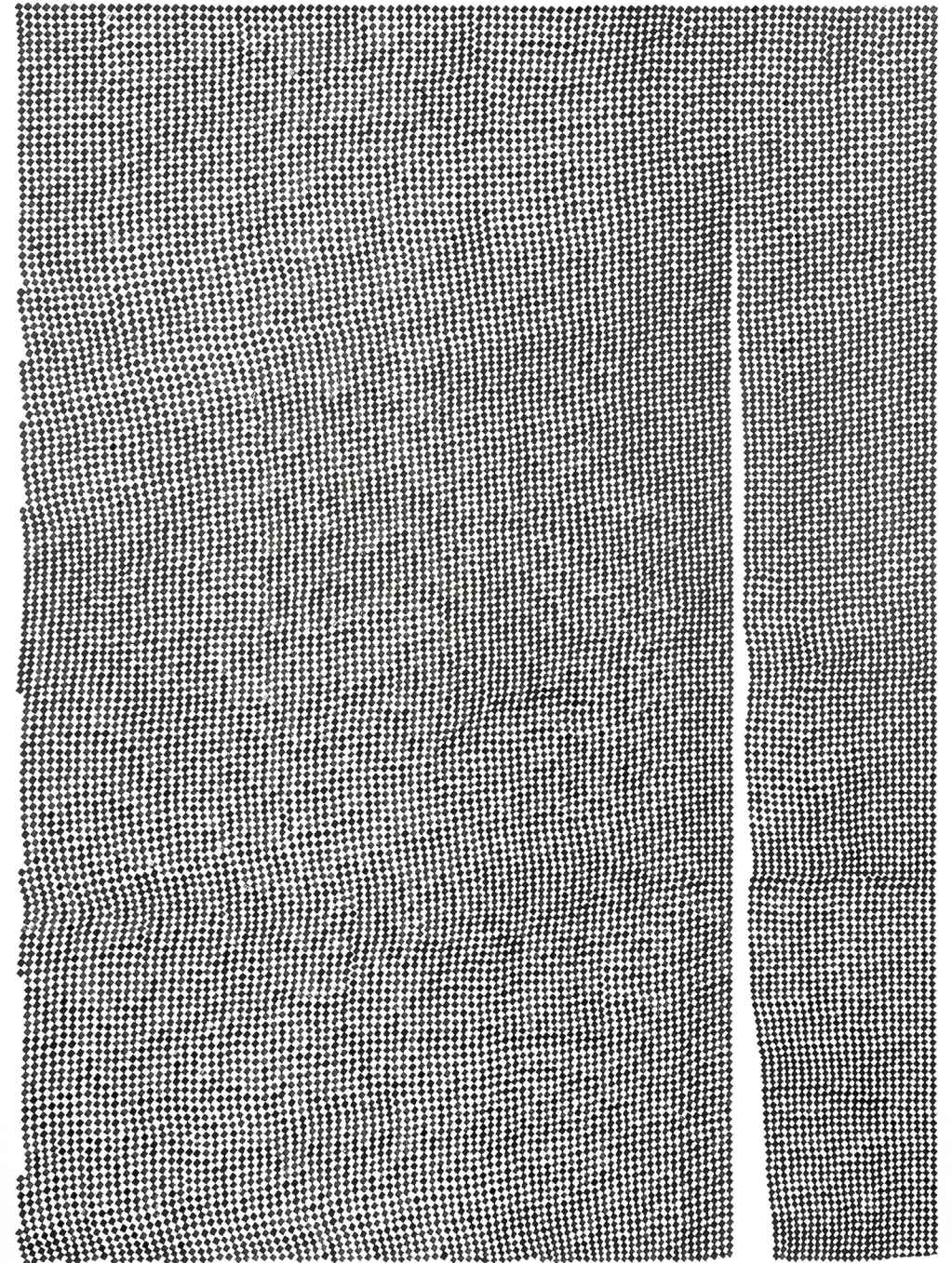
Vasl: And I think your work even in those archives is monochromatic?

²⁹) Radiology is the medical specialty that uses medical imaging to diagnose and treat diseases within the body

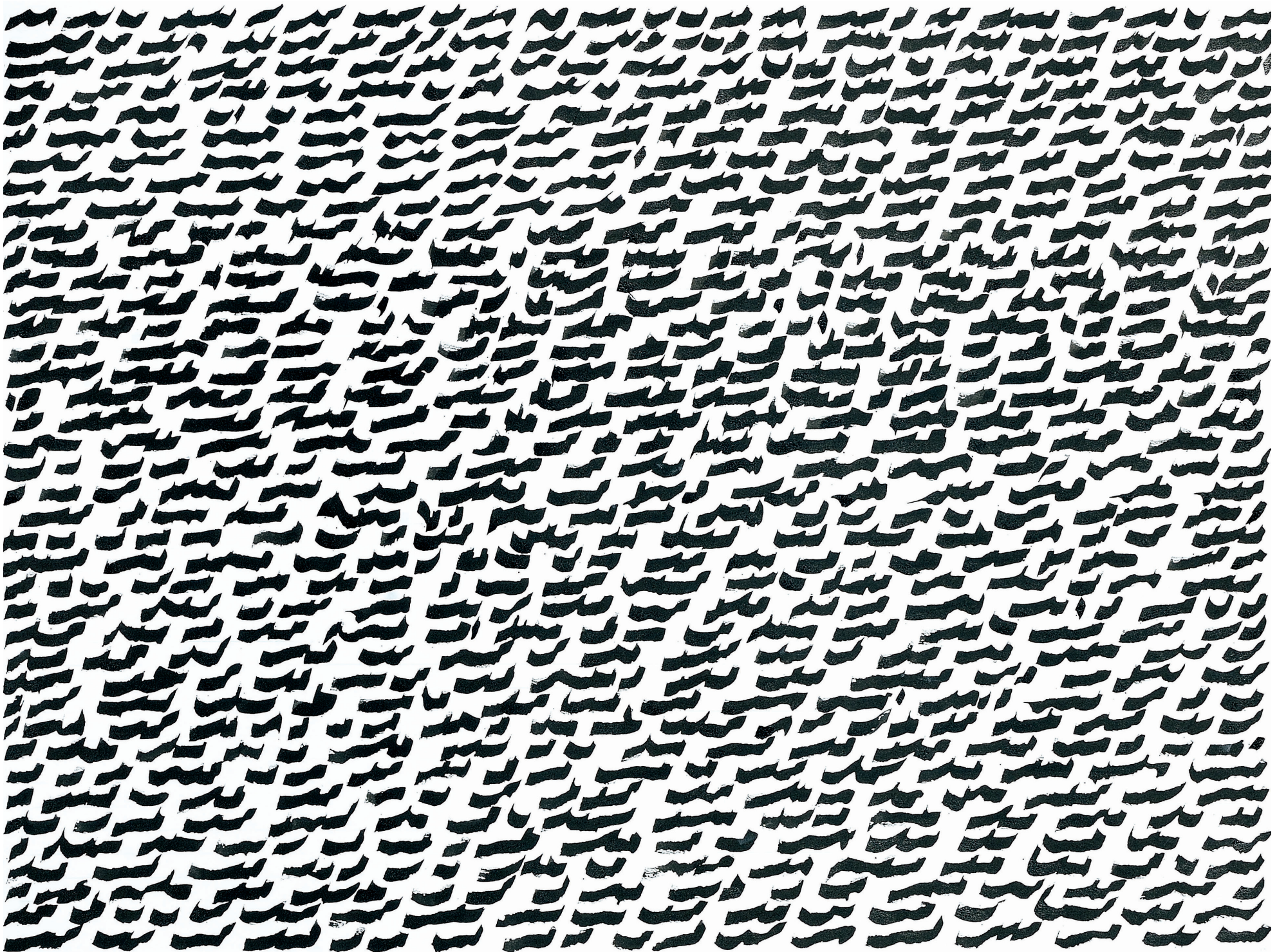
³⁰) The Vasil Artists' Association's Taaza Tareen residencies are designed for recent 'fresh' graduates to reflect, research, and produce new work alongside their peers for a time period spanning 5-6 weeks.



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Mohammad Ali: Yes, I used to do linear drawings.

Vasl: Do you agree when people say that your work is minimalist?

Mohammad Ali: No, I hate it, minimalists remove things.

Vasl: Some of your work, a lot of it looks like it has been digitally printed. Have you ever thought why you are consciously making something manually when it could be printed or screen printed.

Mohammad Ali: So I have two kinds of work. Qudus Sahab once wrote a really good article about my work, there are two kinds of writing, manual writing and the other is typing, he said that my work is in between - it is either digital or manual, they are two different expressions. Yes, I also feel that too, but I don't do it purposely, I wanted to make my painting flat. I was just working and when I saw the result I could see optical illusions in my work. And sometimes I get very uncomfortable with these things, why is this happening, you are only working for optical illusions, and I am very reluctant with it, that it doesn't happen.

I titled it 'Machine Drawing' (picture). In this, you have seen notebooks or copies. The ones we use in schools and colleges. The English writing copy has four lines, mathematics has a grid and Urdu has one line. So they make these books in Urdu Bazaar³¹, and everything is done by a machine, I was working with this for the Devi Art Foundation³², I made a library and I think I made around 250 books with Canson sheet and I took my ink with me because I don't like the ink they use.

Vasl: So you utilized the machine?

Mohammad Ali: Machine, yes. I made this with a ruler and Rotring pen.

Vasl: When did you first start getting a very positive response to your work?

Mohammad Ali: Asim Farid, my friend came from New York and he

³¹) Urdu Bazaar is a market with more than thousand book sellers and publishers.

³²) Devi Art Foundation was established to facilitate the viewership of creative expression and artistic practice that exists in India.

visited my studio, he saw my work and appreciated it - he collects art for himself. That time Hammad Nasar³³ also came for the first time from Green Cardamom³⁴. I think it was in 2006, I have a really bad memory I forget everything.

Vasl: (laughs) Okay!

Mohammad Ali: I think 2006 or 2007, he came and he really liked my work. I was getting many shows, two or three solos and as well as group shows. My friends were very concerned that why am I doing so many shows so quickly. So I told them I have a lot of work with me from the past five to six years, so I am exhibiting.

Vasl: Before this, was it difficult struggling as an artist?

Mohammad Ali: No, I enjoyed it, it was really nice.

Vasl: But financially? In this book we talk about the difficulties for artist to sometimes make the work they want to make.

Mohammad Ali: No, I had alternate solutions. You always feel that it was such a fun time because you were doing things.

Vasl: Do you find that teaching, especially being in an environment like NCA, is enough to be constantly inspired as an artist?

Mohammad Ali: I don't know (laughs).

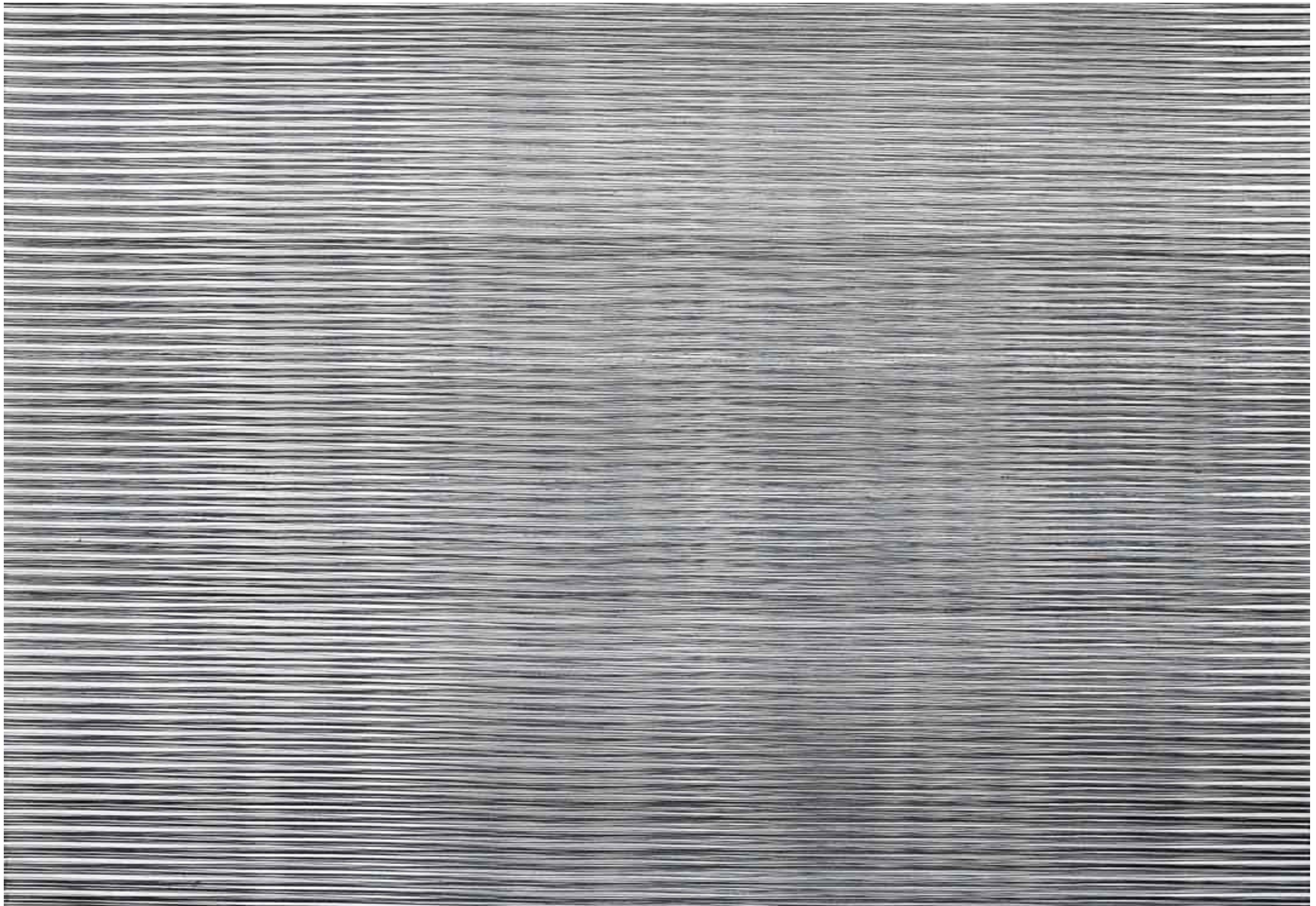
Vasl: (laughs) And what do you think about work? Do you think about some kind of work that is 3 dimensional or maybe a performance piece?

Mohammad Ali: I don't like it when people come to me and say '**... you make very meditative and spiritual work**'. It's very frustrating, there are unresolved things, uncertainty in my work, how can you see spirituality in my work? If I'm saying this then it's okay. I don't feel about it that way, the process of my work is not what you think. Sometimes you get stuck, then you restart it.

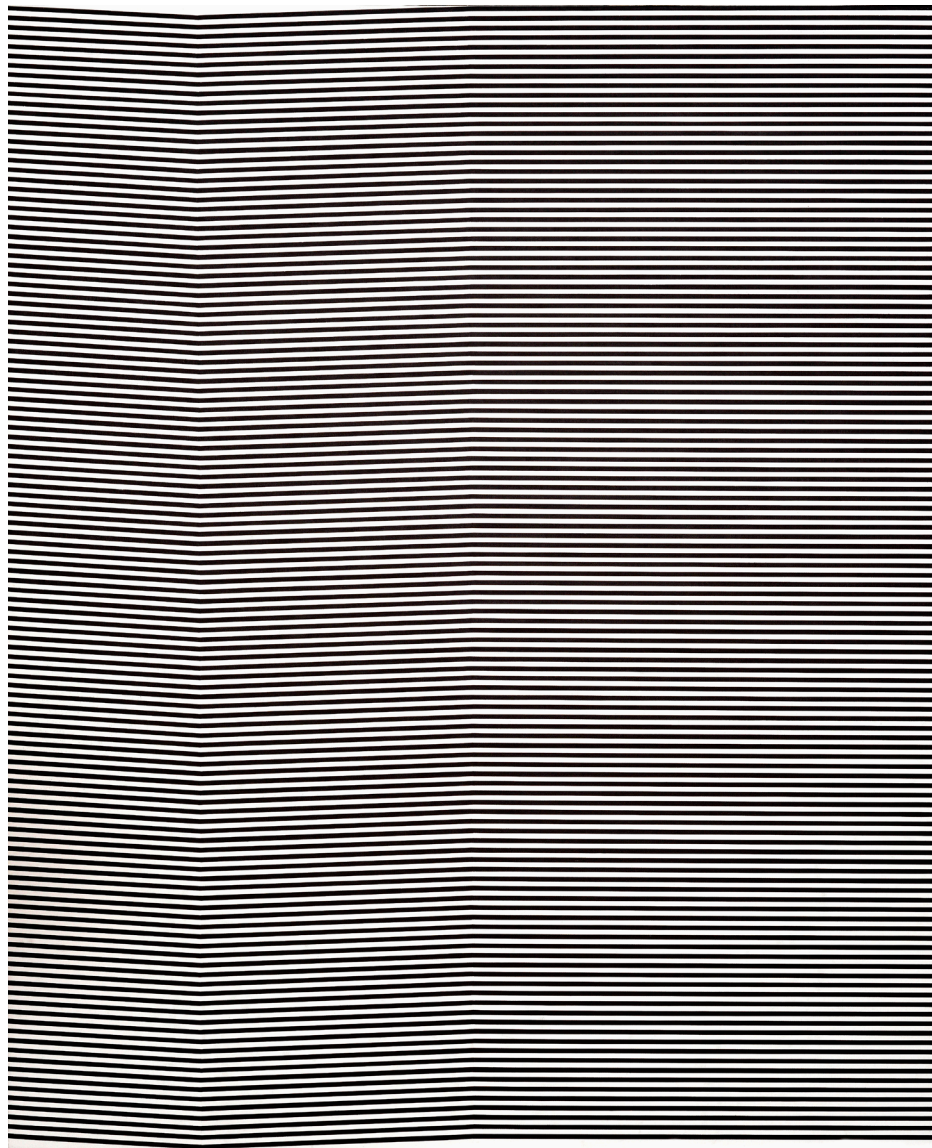
³³) Hammad Nasar is a distinguished author, international curator, former gallerist, co-founder of the arts organisation Green Cardamom.

³⁴) Green Cardamom develops visual arts projects in partnership with museums and other cultural organizations.

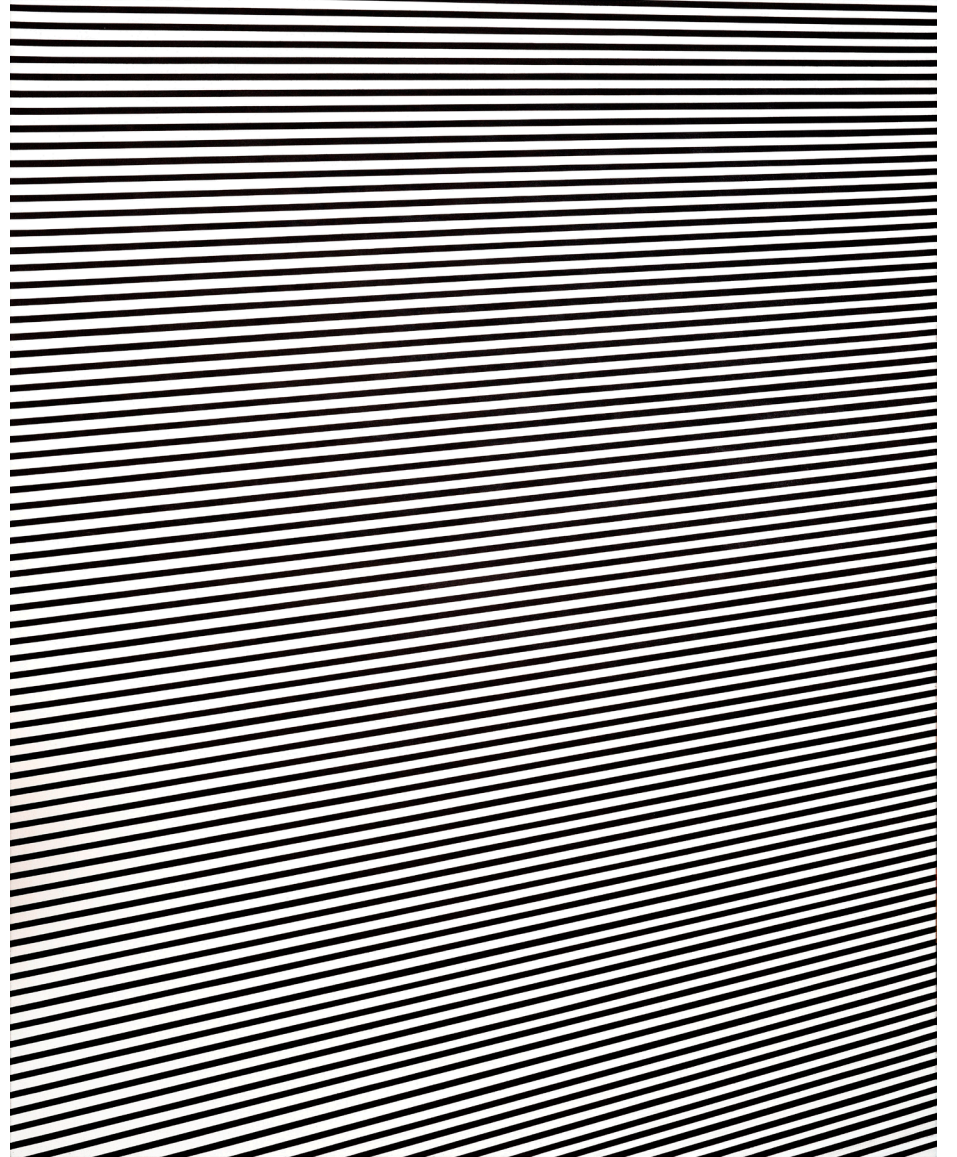
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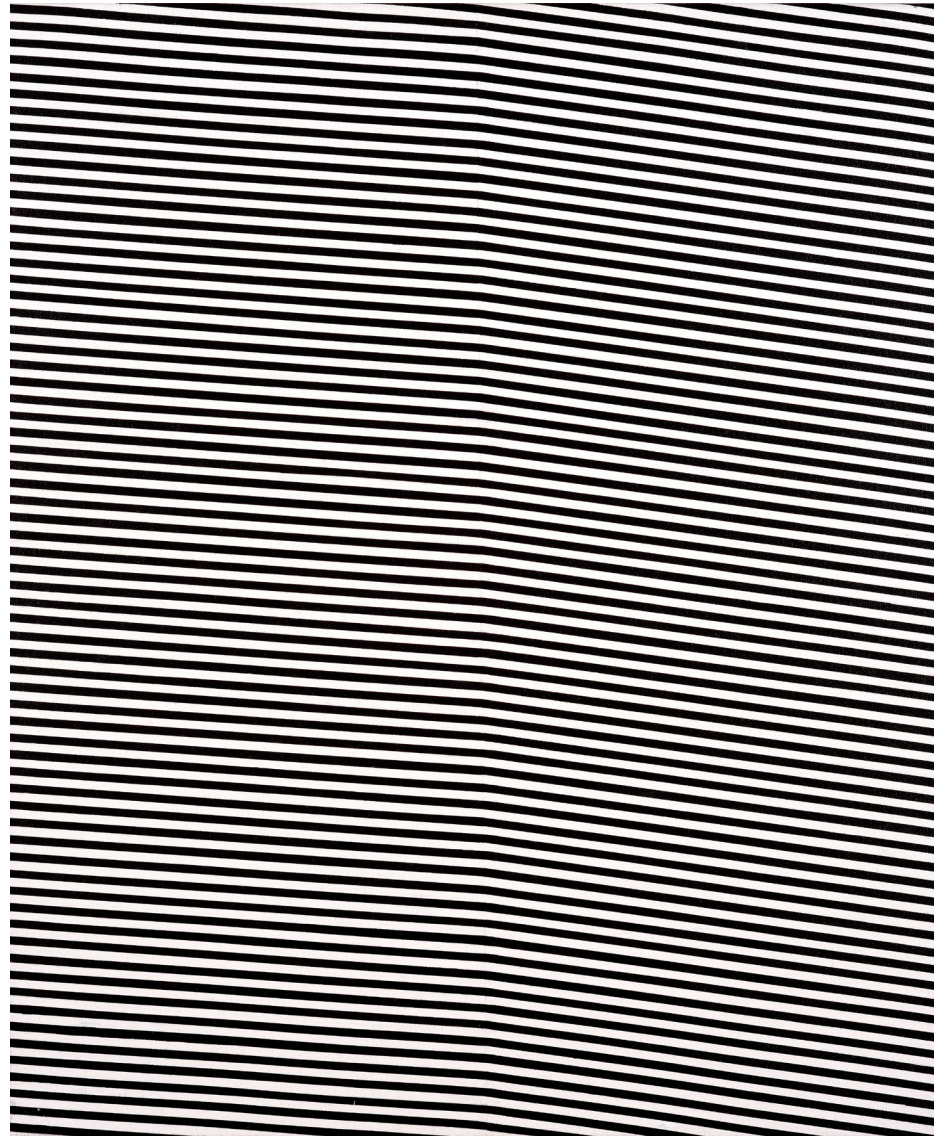
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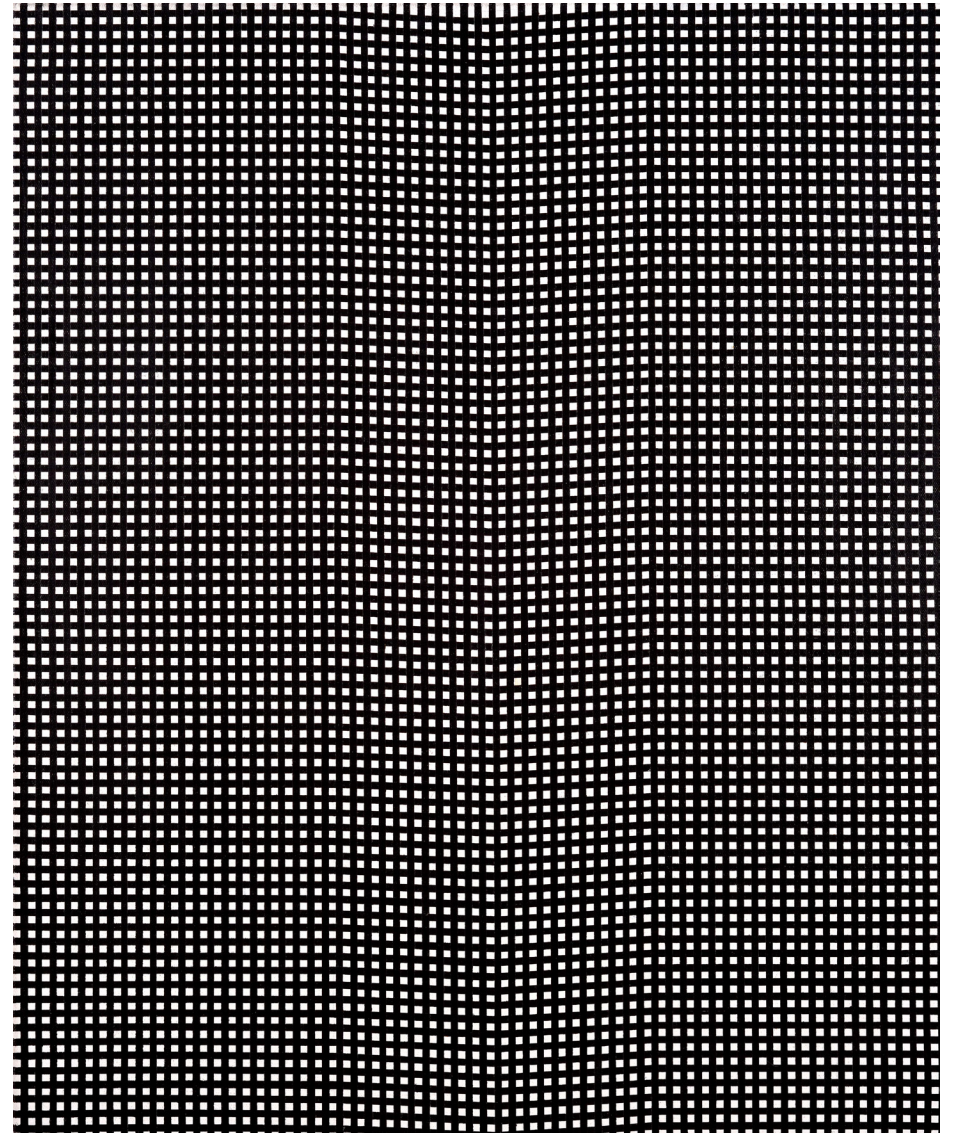
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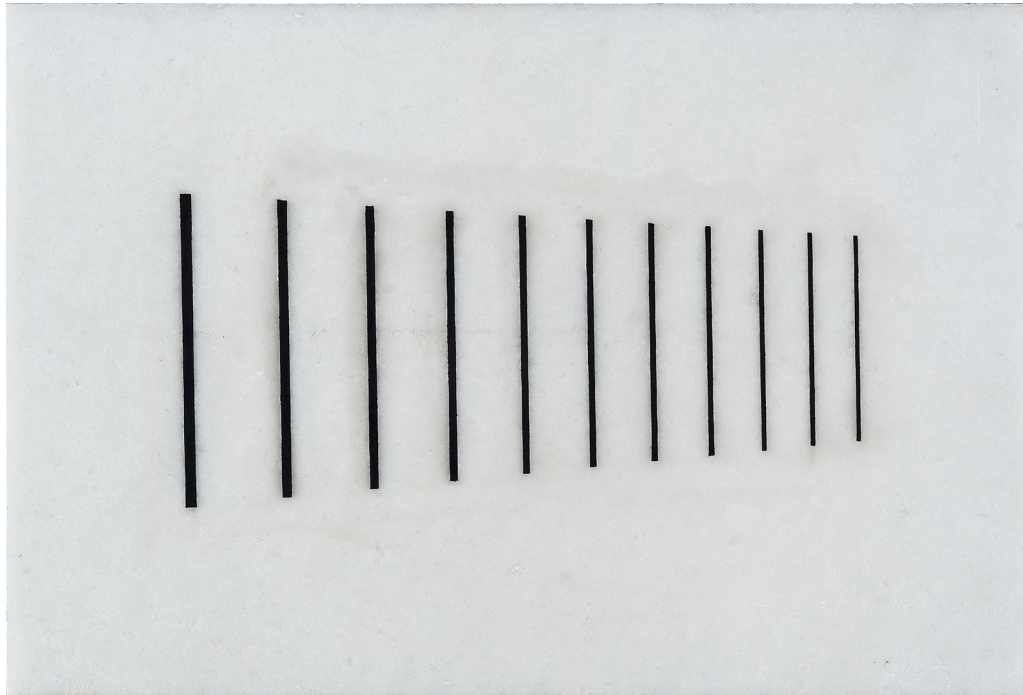
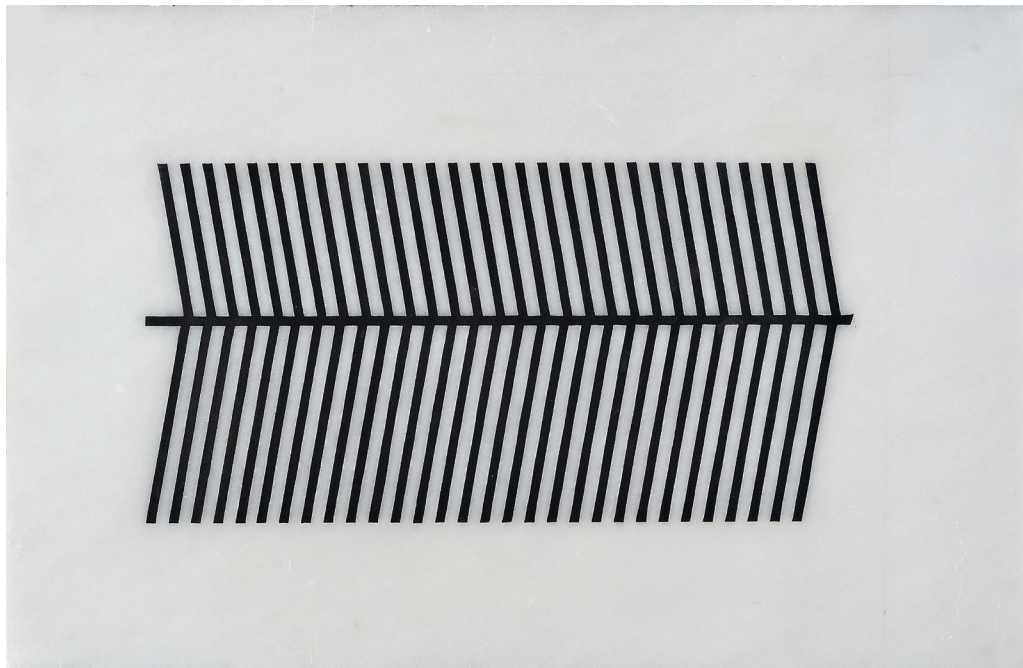
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Vasl: How long does it take you to make one body of work?

Mohammad Ali: It depends! I did something with marble, I drew on the tombstone (picture).

Vasl: Do you collect art?

Mohammad Ali: Very few. I have Quddus Sahab's work, Rashid's, Ma'am Hashmi's, and I think that's all.

Vasl: I wanted to ask you about... in these books we are also discussing residencies, workshops or any particular research program you have done which has really affected your practice?

Mohammad Ali: Hmm... No. I haven't experienced it, but I did come to Vasl, in 2004.

Vasl: So that's the only residency you have done?

Mohammad Ali: No, I have done two. In Khoj³⁵, India, but I think the Vasl residency was the best, then Khoj. In the Khoj residency, I took cable networks in which you can easily get private channels. So I made one strip for that, which was streaming on the TV channel which says, 'There is a boy who is wearing a green shirt and white pants, and he can speak Hindi, but he can't write Hindi'. I mean we say as a Pakistani we can speak Hindi, but we can't write. And he is lost and I had given my contact number and I wrote that whoever finds him, contact me. I used a picture from my childhood, and on the open day it was streaming. Vasl residency was fun, it was my first residency, they give you a space to live, they give you food (laughs). I guess it was the first in Pakistan.

Vasl: Do you think these opportunities will help?

³⁵) Green Cardamom develops visual arts projects in partnership with museums and other cultural organizations.

Mohammad Ali: I feel it's good. Some people get a lot of opportunities, you interact with people on a different level.

Vasl: How did it influence your work, when you are working with other people around you like in one space?

Mohammad Ali: No, I work alone.

Vasl: Is it fair to say that you are a very disciplined artist?

Mohammad Ali: No! (Laughs) But I do need privacy when I am working, discipline is a different thing and privacy is a different thing. Sometimes, my students also help me in my work, but it depends on the sensibility of the work, like sometimes I take their help in priming the canvas and they help me, but not like that. I work alone because of the comfort zone.

Vasl: Hmm. Any particular exhibitions you want to discuss or any particular shows that really changed your career or your work?

Mohammad Ali: It's completely different, I'm not like those who become famous overnight.

Vasl: But gradually?

Mohammad Ali: Yes gradually. My work was in the Shanghai Art Fair³⁶, I saw many other big artists' work over there. And I was also a part of the Dubai Art Fair³⁷. I had a different experience in all these places, but none of them was like that I was completely transformed.

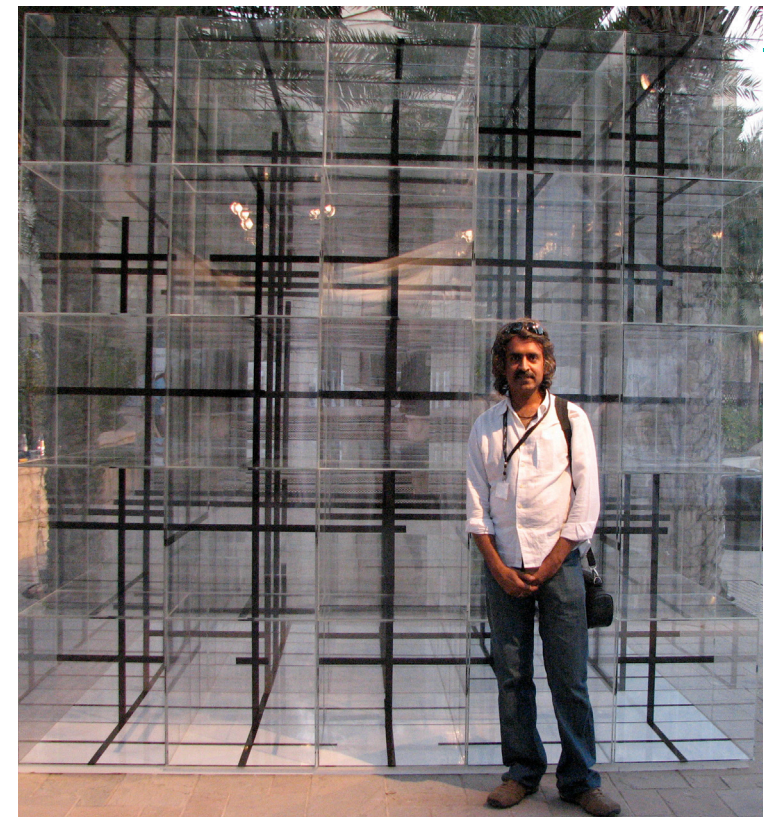
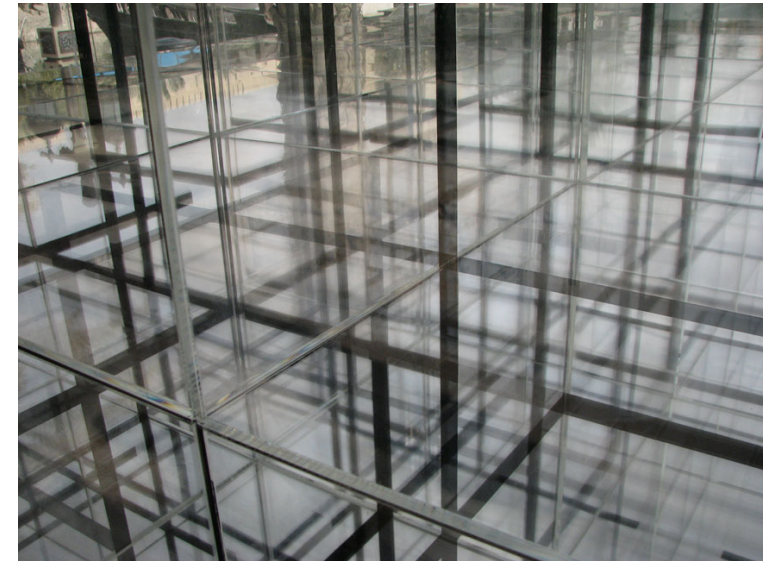
Vasl: And when you go back home to Hyderabad do you ever practice?

Mohammad Ali: No, I don't do that anymore. I tried it before that I will go and do it, but every time I failed because I never do it.

Vasl: (Laughs) But why?

³⁶) Shanghai Art Fair is a leading international contemporary art fair that takes place every year in Shanghai.

³⁷) Art Dubai is a leading international art fair that takes place every March in Dubai.



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Mohammad Ali: It feels nice that you belong to that place. My friends are also there, my home is there. I work in Lahore and when I go back to Hyderabad I am so comfortable around everything, I don't feel like working.

Vasl: But do you think that it affects your work by accident?

Mohammad Ali: Going there is very important. I feel very suffocated in Lahore. Whenever I need a break from Lahore, I go back to Hyderabad. Sometimes I go to my friends or in the bazaar, it's very important for me, it's just like you need a break from your job.

Vasl: Absolutely! One more question, tell me about some of your favorite writers and musicians.

Mohammad Ali: Writer I like Intezaar Hussain. It was somewhere written in one of his books that in some war zone city, let's say Syria because he hasn't mentioned the name. So there is a guy who is writing a romantic poem and he is the most peaceful person in that city. Some people act differently during the war, but his reaction was completely different because during the time of war he is writing a romantic poem. So his writings gave me confidence that it's really good that we are thinking differently in every situation. Everyone reads poetry, I like Shah Latif's³⁸. I like poetry and Intezaar Sahib.

Vasl: You read literature and poetry and is that why you wanted to study calligraphy?

Mohammad Ali: No. I wasn't interested in poetry like that, my mother used to recite poetry for us. She used to make ralli³⁹, I used to sit with her and see how she made it. Ralli is a very interesting thing and you will see the presence of the entire family in one ralli. My mother used to take our old dresses, mine, her's, my father's, sister's, brother's. She used to cut small patches of each member's clothes and stitch them together.

Vasl: It is a matter of home environment.

³⁸) Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai was a Sindhi Sufi scholar, mystic, saint, and poet, widely considered to be the greatest Muslim poet of the Sindhi language.

³⁹) Ralli are traditional quilts made by women in the areas of Sindh, Pakistan, western India, and in surrounding areas.

Mohammad Ali: I think so.

Vasl: Alright. Is there any particular musicians you like?

Mohammad Ali: All the musicians like, Amy Winehouse⁴⁰, Mai Dhai⁴¹ and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan⁴², Ayaz Fareed⁴³, and many more. I listen to their music a lot, especially when I am working in my studio or I'm driving. I have done some work related to music, I also made Mai Dhai's music video.

Vasl: Okay, recently?

Mohammad Ali: Few years back.

Vasl: Okay, but why?

Mohammad Ali: I really enjoy all these things. I have shot and edited the whole video myself. The other day someone was telling me about some Pakistani Rockstar and that he still lives with his parents and I was like, 'What is this yaar?'+

Vasl: (laughs).

Mohammad Ali: (laughs) Who are these people? Everyone laughs.

Vasl: And do you think your interest in film and music... that you can take it further? Because you said before that you want to take a break?

Mohammad Ali: I don't do it commercially, I do it because I enjoy it. Sometimes I feel like I should do something. Have you heard of Mai Dhai's song 'Sarak Sarak'?

⁴⁰) Amy Winehouse was an English singer and songwriter. She was known for her deep, expressive contralto vocals and her eclectic mix of musical genres, including soul, rhythm and blues, and jazz.

⁴¹) Mai Dhai is a Pakistani classical singer hailing from Tharparkar, Sindh.

⁴²) Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was a Pakistani vocalist and musician, primarily a singer of Qawwali, a form of Sufi Islamic devotional music.

⁴³) Ayaz Fareed is a Pakistani Qawwal, belongs to the Qawwal Bachchon Ka Gharana of Delhi. He and his relatives are the flag-bearers of that school of music, which is also known by the name of the city as the Delhi gharana.

⁴⁴) Yaar is a urdu/hindi word use to address in a friendly form.

Vasl: No.

Mohammad Ali: You haven't? I went to Umerkot, she lives there and then she came to my house. We went to the shrines in Multan, and then we went back to Lahore. We went to Bullay Shah's⁴⁵ shrine, and then we were in Lahore. After that she also sang a few songs in Coke Studio⁴⁶. Then I went to America. A few months back, I went back to Umerkot, I really like her voice, you should listen to it sometime.

Vasl: Okay. And I wanted to ask does Sindhi language come into your work?

Mohammad Ali: Yes.

Vasl: Is it conscious?

Mohammad Ali: No, it wasn't. You edit things consciously, now see if you haven't seen a good painting how can you make a good painting? If a musician hasn't heard a good composition before how can he produce something? Painting is a different medium and poetry is a different medium. I want to tell you a stanza from a poem, 'Manjha munjhe rooh, je wanjhen sajan wisri lagay lagay rooh thar baabiyo thi waran'. Meaning there is a bird whose name is 'baabiyo', you will find baabiyo in a desert and he gets crazy during the mating season in summer. So he is flying and he saw the water, he went there and dies. The poet says, 'If I was a bird, I will fly like him'. I am not good at translating.

Vasl: Because you are a teacher and in these books we... our target audience is young artists. Do you have any advice for the younger generation of Pakistani artists, especially since you teach?

Mohammad Ali: I think they should be independent and then slowly they will understand things. When you are working honestly, you don't need a guru⁴⁷ or a second person. You do need a little

⁴⁵ Bullay Shah was a Mughal-era Punjabi Islamic philosopher and Sufi poet.

⁴⁶ Coke Studio is a Pakistani television programme and international music franchise which features live studio-recorded music performances by established and emerging artists.

⁴⁷ Guru is a Sanskrit term that connotes someone who is a teacher, guide or master of

help from your teacher, then you can see how are you doing things on your own.

Vasl: Speaking of being independent what do you think should change in the Pakistani art institutes or galleries? Are there certain things, you think, they really need to change?

Mohammad Ali: I feel, in Pakistan we have so many big artists, but we do not have galleries for them. I feel change will come in Pakistan, we have a really interesting art scene in Pakistan. I think the way we used to have things, like art was in sports, it was in squash, cricket, then our Pakistani pop music. In 80s and 90s all the young boys used to jam and play guitars. Art was like that before, now it's more open, people are more independent. You should see art in Bhutan, Srilanka, in your surroundings, in India, China. We do have works in Pakistan, the scale is really small, but we do have good works.

Vasl: How do you think you can increase the scale of it? Some people say museums are really important in Pakistan.

Mohammad Ali: No, I don't think I can because I'm not Edhi⁴⁸ Sahab!

Vasl: (laughs). And I wanted to ask when you go back to Hyderabad do you think there is a big gap in the contemporary art scene there, as opposed to Karachi or Lahore?

Mohammad Ali: They have CEAD⁴⁹, Sindh University⁵⁰, and then all the Fine Art students visit the galleries in Karachi. They paint, they exhibit their works in the galleries in Karachi. I don't think there should be an excuse for this, but the environment is different. But if you ask about the exhibitions, it depends on them if they want to do it or not.

certain knowledge or field.

⁴⁸ Abdul Sattar Eidhi was a Pakistani philanthropist, ascetic, and humanitarian who founded the Edhi Foundation, which runs the world's largest volunteer ambulance network, along with homeless shelters, animal shelter, rehab centres, and orphanages across Pakistan.

⁴⁹ CEAD, Center of Excellence of Art and Design, Jamshoro

⁵⁰ The University of Sindh is a public research university in the residential area of Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan.

Glossary

Solo Shows

Big Talk Word Canvas Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan 2016

Dazzle Bedazzle Embezzle Canvas Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan 2015

Anything Goes... ArtChowk Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan 2010

Selected Group Exhibitions

Fine Print - Etching and Aquatint IVS Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan, 2017

The Missing One OCA Office of Contemporary Art, Norway 2016

Antidote Dubai, U.A.E. 2016

The Missing One Dhaka Art Summit, Bangladesh 2016

Speaking in the Tongues KLF, Karachi 2015

Dreamscape Amin Gullji Gallery, Karachi 2014

Moscow Biennale, Moscow 2014

SCOPE BASEL 2014

New Positions II AB Gallery, Switzerland 2014

Sindh Art Fest, Karachi 2014

Mad in Karachi ArtChowk Gallery, Karachi 2014

Extra Ordinary 37 Artists Canvas Gallery, Karachi 2013

Abu Dhabi Art Fair AB Gallery, Switzerland 2013

Drawn Attack Canvas Gallery, Karachi 2013

SCOPE BASEL 2013

STOP-LOOK-LISTEN Canvas Gallery, Karachi 2013

New Positions AB Gallery Luzern, Switzerland 2013

Miniature Matters V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi 2013

Attaining Heights V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi 2012

Cast Rituals 3D Box Portfolio IVS Gallery, Karachi 2012

When The Land Escapes Koel Gallery, Karachi 2012

Mad in Karachi ArtChowk Gallery, Karachi 2011

Division by Zero. Carbon 12 Dubai, U.A.E. 2011

And nothing but the truth, IVS Gallery, Karachi 2011

Encounters Rohtas 2 Gallery, Lahore 2011

Tea House Poppyseed Gallery, Karachi 2010

IVS Alumni Show, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, 2009

Voices World Bank, Islamabad 2005

Kara Art Festival Show 2005

American Club, Karachi 2004

Quartet Expressions V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi 2004

Kara Art Festival Show 2004

Emerging Talent Show V. M. Art Gallery, Karachi 2003

Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture Degree Show 2003

Artist Residencies And Workshops Attended

Fine Print - Etching and Aquatint Workshop Department of Fine Art, Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and Vasl Artists' Association, Pakistan 2017

The International Steels Limited (ISL) and Canvas Gallery Sculpture Residency Pakistan 2017

