



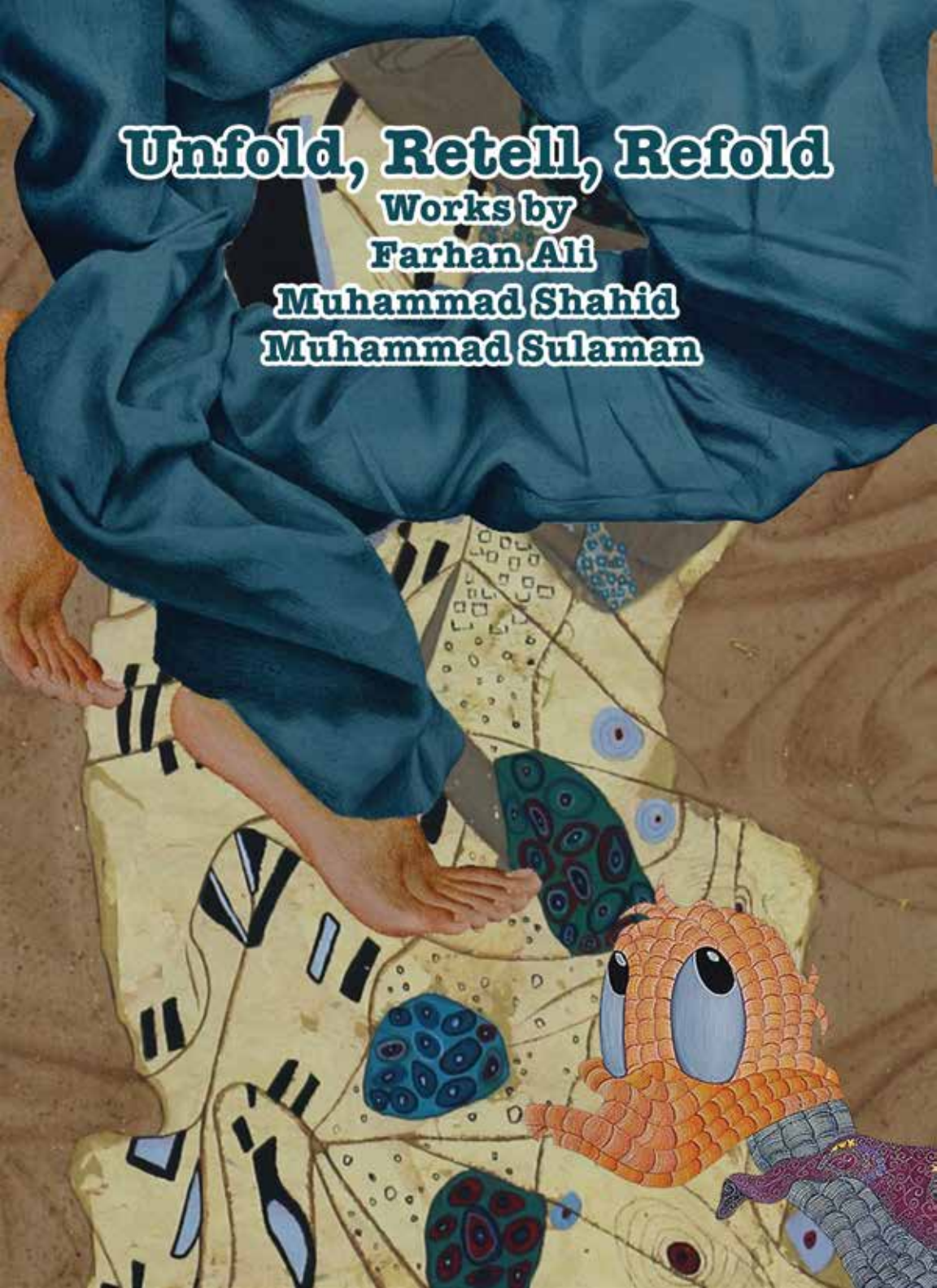
Unfold, Retell, Refold

Works by

Farhan Ali

Muhammad Shahid

Muhammad Sulaman



This catalogue accompanies the exhibition

Unfold, Retell, Refold



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Unfold, Retell, Refold

Dua Abbas Rizvi

The search for newness is one the post-modern mind is rather obsessed with. In an age that drains uniqueness from every act of creativity, the artist's supreme quest has become to append new meaning to the existing and the old, to reanimate, like a necromancer, bodies turned too soon to corpses by the coldness of the last century. Umberto Eco, in a post script he published to his novel, *The Name of the Rose*, writes of the 'fragmentation of the image', and the 'blank canvas' and 'musical silence' of 20th century avant-garde. 'So the trend', he explains, 'was to reconsider the artistic tradition with irony and quotation. Through the centuries, every painter or poet was under the influence of his predecessors, but only now are we conscious of that. It can mean you still pay homage, but with a wink to your reader.'

This homage can, and has taken, the form of a pastiche, parody, reworking, continuation, or appropriation of revered material from the past. From specimens of 'high art', such as Francis Bacon's take on Velazquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X, to examples of popular culture (Lisa Simpson as Mona Lisa Simpson, or the infamous mask donned by the murderers in the *Scream* franchise that is modelled after the ghoulish face from Munch's *Scream*), our world is teeming with repeated confrontations with what we have been left with. With regards to art being produced locally, these confrontations, in addition to the post-modern discourse, encompass a dialogue between the eastern and western visual traditions.

So, in many ways, what our artistic community is attempting to reconcile is not only the disparity between the dated and the modern but between the two distinctly separate strands of history that we have inherited. Our influences include the western canon of art, but in an effort to reclaim a past that has been written for us, we are increasingly looking at ways to disassemble and re-evaluate that canon. Many of our contemporary artists, such as Ahmad Ali Manganhar and Hasnat Mehmood, revisit icons of western art armed with the scrutiny of the dispossessed, inspiring many younger artists to work with appropriation in a similar vein.



Let's go, Muhammad Sulaman, gouache on wasli, 44 x 32 cm, 2016



Melmen, Farhan Ali, gouache on wasli, 101 x 101 cm, 2016



Resisting to remember, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 50 x 76 cm, 2016



Patience, Muhammad Sulaman, gouache on wasli, 50 x 67 cm, 2016



Untitled, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 50 x 76 cm, 2016

A casual, first glance at the works of three young artists displaying at *Sanat Gallery* appears to document this. The paintings on wasli look at once familiar and distant, like a beloved view from a window being suddenly frosted over and split into innumerable, tiny crystals. In works by Muhammad Shahid, you can see some of the most reproduced and travestied images of all time – Vermeer’s ageless Dutch girl with the pearl earring, Ingres’ statuesque Odalisque, Klimt’s majestic, tightly wound lovers – as crumpled pieces of cloth. The holiest markers of the course of art history become kerchiefs, consigned to the ground. Their grand sitters are liberally distorted by Shahid, as he dramatises the folds of each cloth. These folds could signify time and the changing light in which these artworks are, and have been, viewed. They could also be a comment on the proliferation of images in our internet-driven era and a loss of experiential viewing.



Meanwhile, Farhan Ali chooses to examine popular culture and its role in shaping our psyches. He creates stuffed toys based on globally recognised, anthropomorphic cartoon characters from television, and tears them apart, rearranging them with bits and pieces of traditional textiles to provide visual references for his miniature paintings. Animated films and toys carry unquestionable meaning and influence for children. Through the act of making, destroying, and remaking these cartoon figures, Ali seems to be pointing to both the violence and absurdity that underlies many of these features as well as the assimilation of different cultures into one, leading to the disintegration of separate identities and a post-modern state of flux.

Concerns about identity are also raised in miniature



Shattered, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 50 x 76 cm, 2016



Slave mistress with enslaved , Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 50 x 76 cm, 2016



Losing the stretcher, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 76 x 50 cm, 2016



A bit more, Muhammad Sulaman, gouache on wasli, 50 x 67 cm, 2016

paintings by Muhammad Sulaman. Sulaman probes the extent to which one's clothes and apparel can affect one's social interactions. Through his finely painted images of (mostly) bodiless garments floating eerily around, he questions the store we put in appearances and our acceptance of clothing and personal style as indicators of another's personality, past, and aspirations. In some of his works, clothing is also intrinsically linked with posture and he uses a few of the most memorable arrangements of limbs from art history to drive his point home. You see enacted, for example, with just a pair of arms emerging from otherwise empty shirts, Michelangelo's Creation of Adam, and you wonder if the grandeur of the gesture is emphasised by the expensive looking shirts. For Sulaman, it seems that identity and perception are intertwined, each constantly informing the other.



Viewed together, works by this trio of talented graduates from the National College of Arts Lahore, speaks most strongly, perhaps, of an eclecticism that is born of cultural chaos. When hemmed in by a babel of visual, historical tongues, it is best to use the confusion to create.



Mother of Jesus Christ, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 76 x 50 cm, 2016



A lost subject, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 76 x 50 cm, 2016

Farhan Ali

I studied about children behavior and its sort of instinct psyche. How an individual is affected by their surrounding and environment. It is human psychology that when you experience or see something in daily routine it becomes normal to you. During this phase, I found a particular object - a toy, because kids feel more comfortable with their favorite toys than anything else; such as the attachment with any object whether they have a toy or a doll they like. I make stuffed toys myself, stitch them, fill them, photograph them, tear them and scan them to change their body language.



A child regularly sleeps with and has it at least for a third of his or her life. Whether it is good or bad, doesn't matter, you feel comfort because you grow up with it; our children see different cultures and environments. Culture is a powerful human tool for survival, but it is a fragile phenomenon. It is constantly changing and easily lost because it exists only in our minds. I call this cultural slavery or some kind of societal pressure.



Duck II, Farhan Ali, gouache on wasli, 101 x 97 cm, 2016



Undulated, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 76 x 50 cm, 2016



Hallucination, Muhammad Sulaman, gouache on wasli, 46 x 65 cm, 2016



Untitled, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 50 x 76 cm, 2016

Muhammad Shahid

Since childhood I've had various experiences of observing the life around us each second and ending in the other. These are experiences of something that no one cares to think about. But for me, it's the beginning of an investigative thought while many others consider these experiences as nothing extraordinary or take them as a normal way of life. My inquisitive mind saw life even in the folds of drapery because I believe that nothing is still, as when we declare something to be a still, that something registers its existence and the only thing that is missing to us is the motion and this is the one reason that adheres to our mind to define the still. Life has many forms and silence too has a sound and this is where I decided to start my expedience of unraveling the mystery through the medium of colors. Just like the famous work of Edvard Munch "The Scream" which itself is a sea of words and such heterogeneous approach towards life compelled me to paint my ideas. This practice later produced works that were silent but sensational to the eyes and the minds of the intellect.



I am exploring the phenomenon of silence that took place for a few seconds or sometimes more specifically the one that occurs after destruction. Such scenes are witnessed nowadays on our television screens where the action goes into a slow motion. I wanted to freeze those moments onto my canvases to see things further. The dilemma that has surrounded the Country and where everyday people fall prey to terrorist attacks on regular basis and belonging to the City that remained prone to the concentrated enemy attacks restricted me to raise my voice through my medium against it. The explosions and the destruction on one hand and the vacuum afterwards that is followed by a silence on the other captured my interest. I tried to depict by painting the minute details where every stroke itself participates as a second of that event and tells the story of the silence where words fail to do so. I showed this by painting a flat color through a slow process of traditional painting (miniature) where each stroke combines with the other and silently hides there under the big picture where the viewer can feel and yet is not able to describe it, just as it is not possible for words to describe every aspect of human life.

In my latest body of work, I have used imagery from renowned paintings of "Old Masters" by amalgamating them with miniature technique. I have introduced these paintings in the form of folds of a draped cloth. I want to explore these western paintings by redeveloping them through miniature technique and the folds simply break their color and perspective. I want to break them to feel the after-effects when things break with a loud screech or sound. I want to push my viewer to see the world of silence that occurs afterwards.

Muhammad Shahid (b. 1989, Peshawar) did his BFA from National College of Arts Lahore in 2013



Amalgamated, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 76 x 50 cm, 2016



Duck I, Farhan Ali, gouache on wasli, 101 x 97 cm, 2016





Triangle, Muhammad Sulaman, gouache on wasli, 65 x 44 cm, 2016



Muhammad Sulaman

My work is a continuous self investigation of my surrounding. I think every person is an amalgamation of his or her appearance. Clothing is one of the most common aspects of our daily life; it is one that has a rather subtle yet important impact on our relationship with one another. I believe we all “read” clothing and grooming on a daily basis to judge the actions, thoughts, and behaviors of others. It seems that these basic necessities of life have crossed the boundaries of fulfilling their purpose and have gone beyond to affect our self-image and even our emotions. My recent body of work is about finding the identities behind clothes. My work has two elements, firstly clothes and secondly essence of human body. I am also exploring

the relation of clothes with human body and also with other clothes by creating an abstract factor in most casual imagery of our clothes. It is like I am creating my own overcoat by exploring different layers of our dressing in my paintings as the renowned writer “Ghulam Abbas” created in his short stories.



Awaiting title, Muhammad Shahid, gouache on wasli, 76 x 50 cm, 2016