

THE TROJAN DONKEY



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April 25, 2020
9:18 pm—11:13 pm PST

Curated By
Amin Gulgee
Sara Vaqar Pagganwala
Adam Fahy-Majeed

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LAMENT

The Book of Lamentations is a collection of poetic laments for the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The book (in the Old Testament and the Hebrew *Ketuvim*) is partly a traditional 'city lament' mourning the desertion of the city by God, its destruction, and the ultimate return of the divinity; and partly a funeral dirge in which the bereaved bewails and addresses the dead. The tone is bleak: God does not speak, the degree of suffering is presented as overwhelming, and expectations of future redemption are minimal. Today there is a note of Old Testament punishment in the air, with a plague having been visited upon us. There is much to lament, to a silent God. However, according to Socrates in *The Republic*, lamentation is something that human beings desire by nature, with compassion being its active component.²

R.M. Naeem laments the constant static of our contemporary news cycle, which bombards the individual with human suffering. *7 Unparallel Minutes* is a bifurcated video piece, comprised of two clocks bracketed by cherubim. The constantly ticking clocks seem to symbolise the inevitable march of mortality. The soundtrack is cacophonous, with almost unintelligible news reports amalgamated in an overwhelming, multilingual stream of unbearable sound.

Kanwal Tariq, in contrast, presents documentation of her melancholic performance work, *The Essence of What Fades*. In this piece, Tariq buried her collaborator – reclining on a rectangular block – in clay, in a personalised type of funeral rite. The silence of the video accentuates its mournful resonance,

as the collaborator's living presence was removed from sight.

Miro Craemer cries out for an absent love in his performance, *YOU*. Craemer – dressed in white – rocked backwards and forwards, and addressed the camera, seemingly unhinged, repeating, 'I love you'. He then proceeds to remove his clothes, vulnerable in nothing but his underwear, whilst continuing to make the same proclamation.

This personal lamentation is reframed in Sheema Khan's video work, *Wash your hands otherwise nature will fix your wagon*. The camera focuses upon the artist washing her hands with turquoise soap fashioned in the shape of babies, which gradually disappear during the process of cleansing. The vanishing babies became a disturbing sacrifice at the altar of personal hygiene.

Also emerging from the temporality of lockdown, Anne Midgette seems to mourn confinement, with a digital clock demonstrating the perpetual lapse of time. In *The Witness*, we are privileged to view a kaleidoscopic series of household interventions and routines, interjected with artworks that engage Midgette's attention. At moments during the video the writer/classical music critic breaks into operatic singing, imbuing it with a requiem-like quality.

Lamentation can simultaneously manifest itself in remembrance of past suffering. Baptist Coelho's *They agreed to eat biscuits and European bread but our regiment refused* documents a 2019 performance, which was inspired by the food and eating habits of Indian soldiers during World War One. Coelho

– dressed in period fatigues of the colonial army – manipulates dough in a studio space, with a multimedia projection foregrounding his historical intervention.

Equally referencing colonial invisibility in accounts of the war effort, Mujtaba Asif marks a photographic book on the Battle of Britain as an educator. In *Evaluating the Answer Script*, Asif ticks every page, and grading it out of a hundred, eventually awards it full marks. The artist plays on the position of a colonial subject in effusively evaluating an iconic British military campaign.

Situated in more recent history, curator Carlos Acero Ruiz documented *Sun City*, Port-au-Prince, during the aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake. Filmed from a moving vehicle, it speaks of resilience in a context of suffering, amplified by the soundtrack; an uplifting Catholic chant in Haitian Creole. This represents a typology of lament that heals and gives hope, amidst human tribulations.

(AG/AFM)

2. Ronald D. Sigley, *Critique of Modernity* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2011), p. 135.

Baptist Coelho

(b. 1977, Mumbai, India)

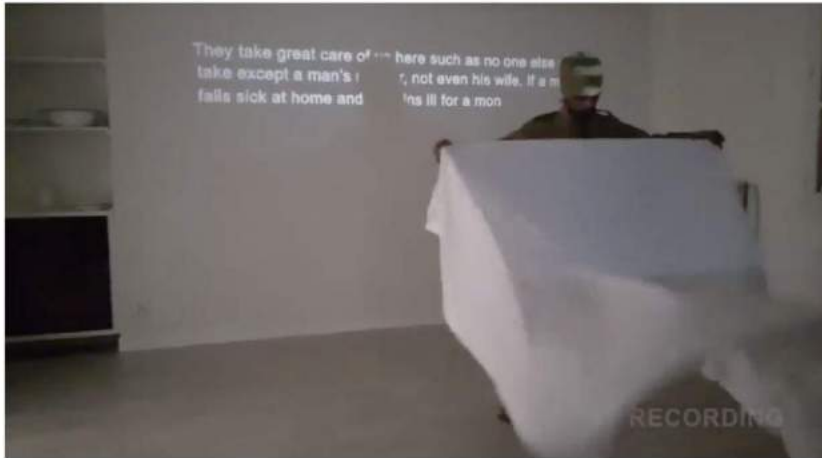
*They agreed to eat biscuits
and European bread but
our regiment refused*

(2019)

6:41 minutes

Paris, France





CURATORS



Amin Gulgee (b. 1965, Karachi, Pakistan) is an artist-curator based in Karachi. He received a BA in Art History and Economics from Yale University in 1986. He has exhibited his sculpture and installation all over the world. His most recent solos were "7" at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy and "7.7" at Mattatoio, Rome, Italy (2018). He has been active as a curator in Karachi since the 1990s. A working artist, he questions the power hierarchy of curatorship. Through his cross-disciplinary approach, he explores unlikely connections to uncover alternative narratives. In 2000, he established the Amin Gulgee Gallery, an artist-led, non-commercial space where he also lives and works. He regularly collaborates with outside curators to realize large-scale projects there. The gallery's primary focus is on contemporary Pakistani art. It has also engaged with South-South dialogues, presenting shows highlighting the connections between African and Southeast Asian art and contemporary Pakistani practices. Exhibitions at the gallery are usually accompanied by catalogues. They include the scholarly volumes *Artists' Voices: Calligraphy* and *Artists' Voices: Body* (Oxford University Press, 2006) and *Pakistan's Radioactive Decade: An Informal Cultural History of the 1970s* (Oxford University Press, 2019.) The gallery is also one of the first to provide a platform for performance art in Pakistan. It has hosted two exhibitions dedicated specifically to it: "Riwhyti: One Stand" (2013) and "Dreamscape" (2015). The most recent show at the gallery was "Outsiders" (2018). A collaboration between

the Amin Gulgee Gallery and the Goethe-Institut, it was a multidisciplinary exploration of urban subcultures in Pakistan and Germany. Gulgee was Chief Curator of the inaugural Karachi Biennale in 2017, which included the work of 182 artists from Asia, Australia, Africa, Europe, South America and North America. In 2019, he curated 32 international artists for "One Night Stand / Coup d'un soir," an exhibition/happening of performance art at the Cité internationale des Arts in Paris, France. The same year, he co-curated, with Sara Pagganwala and Zarmeene Shah, "The Quantum City: Territory | Space | Place" for the First International Public Art Festival in Karachi. In March of 2020, he and Sara Pagganwala co-curated "Lal Jadoo," a group exhibition of Pakistani performance art for the Second International Public Art Festival in Karachi. In August of 2020, he and Pagganwala co-curated "If These Walls Could Talk," a public art event of 34 videos from 21 countries in the heart of Karachi.

Sara Vaqar Pagganwala (b. 1986, Karachi, Pakistan) received her BFA (hons) from Central St. Martins, University of the Arts, London and is a multidisciplinary artist and curator. She has been a part of several group shows locally and internationally. Her work explores the construction and rearrangement of different materials and properties and asks questions about form and control. She also investigates notions of the body and identity as a repetitive constant, especially in her performative work. Pagganwala was an assistant curator for the inaugural Karachi Biennale 2017 and curated

Mix Tape (1), an exhibition of contemporary performance art from all over Pakistan at Canvas Gallery, Karachi. She has since been a part of curating numerous shows in Karachi including *The Quantum City: Territory | Space | Place*, which was the first International Public Art Festival at the iconic Karachi Port Trust (co-curated with Amin Gulgee and Zarmeene Shah); *Lal Jadoo*, an exhibition of performance art at Karachi House and a part of the second International Public Art Festival which was streamed live (co-curated by Amin Gulgee); and *If These Walls Could Talk*, a public art event of 34 videos from 21 countries (co-curated by Amin Gulgee). She has worked as an assistant curator at Canvas Gallery and as part of the adjunct faculty in the Liberal Arts department at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, where she designed and introduced performance art as a course for the first time in Pakistan.

Adam Fahy-Majeed (b. 1996, Sydney, Australia) is a writer and curator currently pursuing his Master's degree in Modern and Contemporary Art History, at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Adam graduated from the University of Leeds in 2019, receiving a Joint Honours BA in History of Art and Italian. In a curatorial capacity, he has been involved in various projects, including the first Karachi Biennale in 2017; and Amin Gulgee's 7 and 7.7 solo-exhibitions in Rome, 2018. His writing has been published in multiple catalogues, as well as in the form of feature-length articles for *The Friday Times*.

This e-catalogue accompanies the online exhibition *The Trojan Donkey* curated by Amin Gulgee, Sara Vaqar Pagganwala and Adam Fahy-Majeed on April 25, 2020 from 9:18-11:13 pm (Pakistan Standard Time)

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