

'STATE'

THE BEGINNING
Saamia Ahmed Vine

Opening 4 p.m.
20-26th
November 2018



Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq Gallery
National College of Arts
4-Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam, Lahore

State: /steɪt/

Noun. 1. The particular condition that someone or something is in at a specific time. 2. A nation or territory considered as an organized political community under one government.

Verb: 1. express something definitely or clearly in speech or writing. 2. present or introduce (a theme or melody) in a composition.

This exhibition marks the beginning of a number of series emanating from my concerns as:

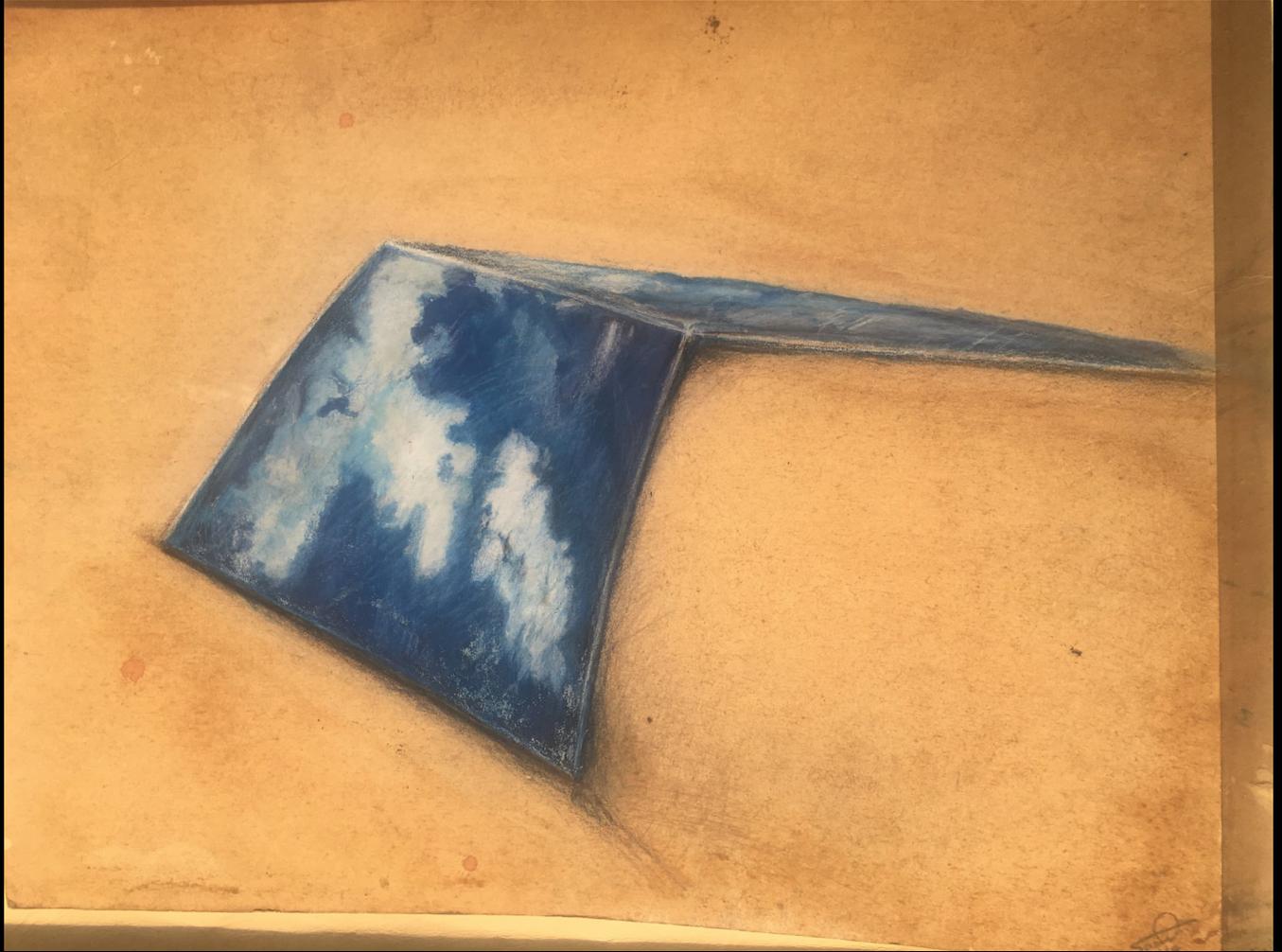
An artist of Kashmiri and Pathan descent

A citizen of Pakistan

A married woman with children and a career in the world of art and education in Pakistan.

The In-charge at the Archives of the National College of Arts, formerly the Mayo School of Industrial Arts

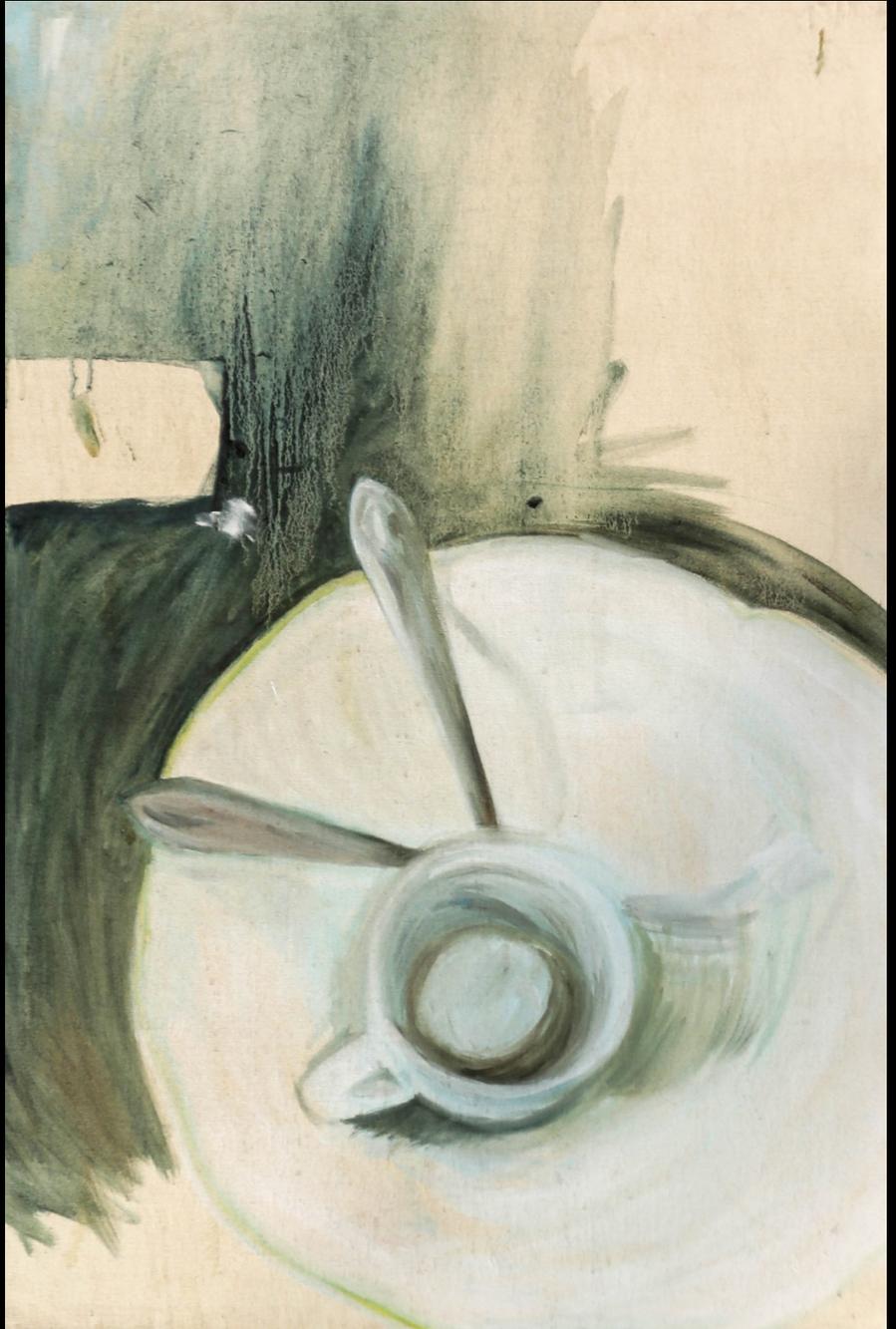
Welcome to My Wonderland



"Falling Pages/ Bent Sky". Gouache on *wasli*. 11x14 inches. 2015.



"Order". Oil on canvas board. 12x18 inches. 2015.



"Pretty White Teacups". Oil on canvas.
36x24 inches. 2017



"Through My Looking Glass" Digital print on paper. 14x11 inches. 2018



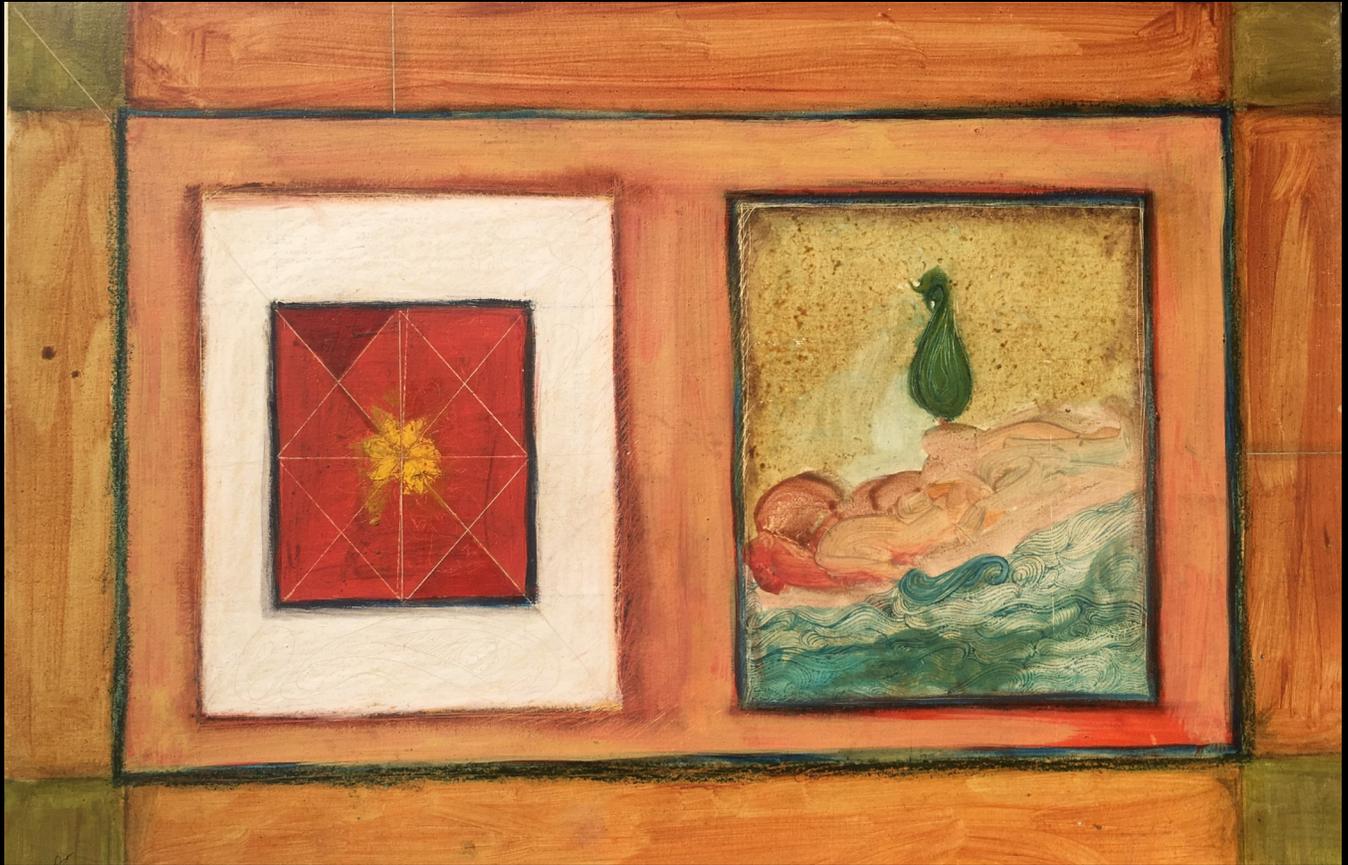
"Punj Darya (The Five Rivers) Part 1" Oil on board. 14x14.5 inches. 2018.



"They Could See the Lights (Contd)". Mixed Media on *wasli*. 11x14 inches. 2015.



"They Know Us Better", Graphite and Tea on Hand-made Paper, 30x22 inches. 2018.



"Seeking Through the Chaos". Oil on canvas board. 12x18 inches. 2015.

'State—The Beginning' is a sensitively created body of work by Saamia Vine showing at the Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq Gallery. Vine's current work is a comment on the world around her today—a world that has ceased to make sense due to a disconnect with our history and an absurd sense of belonging and ownership. The thematic concern of the work comes across as 'loss', that echoes severed roots, loss of personal histories, cultural and historical erasure, and lost heritage in the context of British colonization, Victorian influences and aspirations, migration, dislocation and polarized geographic boundaries. Vine's work is connected by a triangle of narratives, namely, Alice in Wonderland, Dying Inayat Khan and her Kashmiri heritage. She compares her world and her bewildering experience of it to Alice's Wonderland—a world of illogicalities and absurdities and an allegory for Victorian politics and culture. She calls the prevailing situation a "strange dystopia of current times".

To convey this idea of a dystopian world Vine has worked on a series of images that depict mundane objects such as a chair, looking glass, tea cup, sofa, and silk robe/shirt with Kashmiri motifs and patterns. In some works, she has ventured into abstraction and nonobjective forms as well. The objects in Vine's imagery draw attention to the fact that the material culture of a society reflects the social, cultural, political and economic history of a people. According to Vine, these objects float around her with no seeming connection, yet, they create forms laden with symbolic and ambiguous meanings. The reason for this, she believes, is a misrepresentation—informed by the colonial narrative—of the origins, historical context and aesthetic history of these objects. The use of the objects in Vine's aesthetics and imagery is thus a pictorial device to denote, deconstruct and decolonize the past and present of these objects, our perception of them, and thereby, our perception of ourselves as people of the subcontinent.

Vine has employed varied mediums, techniques and surfaces—ranging from ink and collage on paper and *wasli*, to oils and graphite on canvas and board, photo transfers and digital prints—to investigate these objects/forms in order to understand them in relation to their many narratives and to place them in their proper context in history. Resorting to loose, sketch-like and almost intuitive rendering in her works, Vine has emphasized the idea of erasure and ambiguity, as if forms are being drawn out of fading memory. Her choice of medium, technique and surface seem to have been dictated by the particular object she has portrayed in an image lending credence to the belief that medium is content.

In two of her works, Vine references the famous 17th century Mughal miniature painting titled '*Dying Inayat Khan*' (1618) that depicts an ailing and emaciated subject of the Mughal court. Inayat Khan, a mere combination of skin and bones, is portrayed lying on a lavish *deevan*, wrapped in blankets and propped up against large, luxurious cushions. In Vine's works, however, titled '*Inayat Khan*' and '*The Robe of Inayat Khan*' there is a stark absence of the body laying the entire emphasis on the objects. The former is a loosely rendered oil painting on canvas, in which Vine depicts a personal belonging with personal associations/meanings—a red silk shirt woven in her ancestral Kashmir with embroidered paisleys in gold thread—and attributes it to Inayat Khan. The fabric of the shirt and the motif of the paisleys (like other motifs such as the *chinaar*) are symbolic of Vine's personal history and heritage. The shirt, strewn over possibly a sofa which is hidden from the viewer, covers the entirety of the surface save for a strip of the background on top rendered in soft brown and black hues. There is an impression of a body inside the shirt which is no longer there, adding to the ubiquitous idea of loss and absence in this body of work.

The latter is collage on paper, in which one sees a bundled up purple silk robe carelessly thrown over a brown cushion lying on the floor of an ordinary room. In the background is a partial view of a chair, table and a trunk covered with printed cloth. The edges of the cushion extend out of the frame on the left and right. Both the cushion and the robe are relatively larger than the other objects and positioned as if almost upright and floating in the environment. As a result, they appear to be superimposed on the setting, contributing to the artist's narrative of irrationality and senselessness in the world around her. The dying and ghostly body of Inayat Khan in the original miniature can be interpreted as ominous of the decadence and death of Mughal rule, the eventual colonization of the subcontinent and the negation of our culture, history and heritage. Vine, however, very intelligently only appropriates the name 'Inayat Khan' with its connotations of death and decay and uses as a metaphor for cultural erasure and collective historic amnesia.

Another work that piques one's interest is 'Pretty White Teacups'—an oil painting on canvas it portrays a white saucer with an empty white teacup and two silver teaspoons only partly visible from behind the teacup. The objects are placed in the bottom right corner and the saucer extends out of the surface. Viewed from the top the emptiness of the teacup is emphasized. The loose strokes following the round shape of the saucer, the hollow base of the teacup and extending into the background deliver a sense of circular motion and spiritual energy. The objects are symbols of the Victorian culture of elitism, snobbery and social propriety, which we rather willingly imposed upon ourselves negating our own cultural beliefs and practices. These objects also hold personal connotations for the artist in the context of marriage and dowry, where meticulous attention and grave significance was (and still is) attached to silver cutlery, crockery, laying of the tea trolley and tea time niceties.

In a black and white digital print titled 'Through My Looking Glass' one can observe a looking glass with a carved wooden frame covering the entirety of the surface. The print due to its lack of detail and chalky blackness looks more like a charcoal rendering. Interestingly enough, there is no reflection in the looking glass save for a cloudy darkness. The title of the work and the emphatic empty darkness in the mirror lend a sense of emptiness and uncertainty to the work. In other works, Vine draws upon cartography and references the five rivers of the Punjab, directing our attention to our shared history of colonization, Partition, migration and geographic borders.

Vine has used simple imagery to convey her ideas but it is the very simplicity and mundaneness of the imagery that compels us to look beyond the apparent and delve deeper into reading the works on multiple layers. Vine's narrative and subject matter bring to the fore a grim reality of our nation: our colonial legacy of looking at ourselves as the colonists did. Our cultural, social and political identity and history has been dictated by the colonial/Orientalist narrative, and so have been our arts, languages, heritage, and material and visual culture. The Orientalists saw us as the 'Other', the inferior, the uncivilized, and therefore, the white man's burden. Our dilemma today as a nation is that we continue to see ourselves and all that belongs to us through the same colonial lens. Vine's work urges us to question our distorted perceptions and have a rational and meaningful discourse with our history. It urges us to take ownership of our past and present, and deconstruct, decolonize and recreate our identity and reality.

-Farazeh Syed



The Dying Inayat Khan". Col-
lage on paper. 14x11 inches.
2018



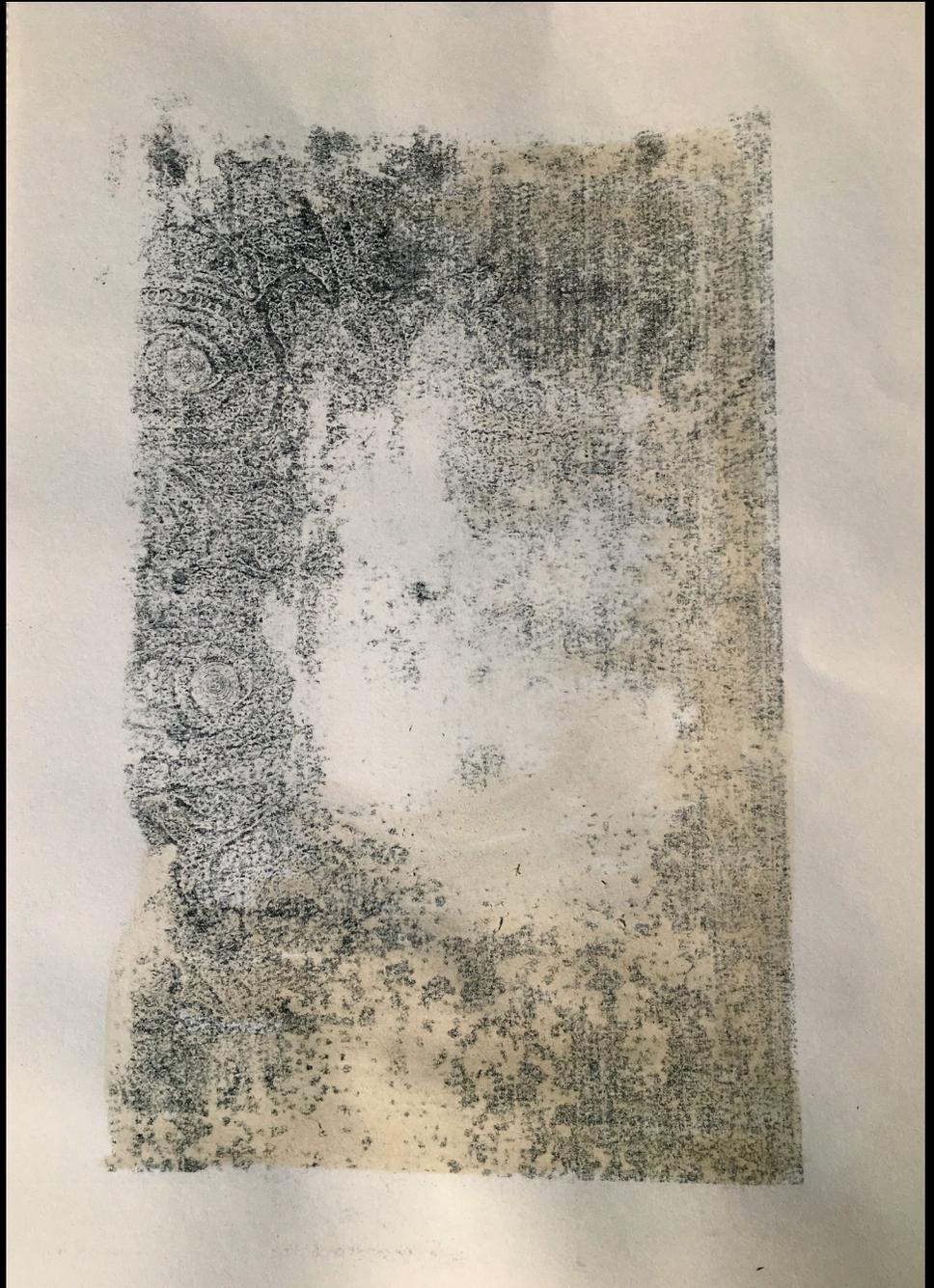
"Inayat Khan". Oil on canvas. 24x36 inches.
2018



"The Robe of Inayat Khan Part 2". Oil on canvas. 36x24 inches. 2017



"The Robe of Inayat Khan". Collage on paper. 14x11 inches. 2018



"They Could See the Lights". Ink
on paper. 14x11 inches. 2018



Fragmentation".
Graphite
and Oil Pastels on Canvas. 40x36
inches. 2018



"Zardozi, Blue Velvet, Raw Silk, Sofa".
36x48 inches. Oil on Canvas. 2018

Saamia Ahmed (Vine)

Email: saamiavine@gmail.com

Associate Professor, National College of Arts, Lahore, Pakistan.

Education:

2003 MA (Hons) Visual Art, National College of Art, Lahore

1999 BFA (Painting) (Honors) NCA, Lahore

Experience:

2000 to date: Practicing artist, art reviewer, and educator, incharge NCA Archives, coordinator International Artist Residency and Office of International Linkages and Collaborations, NCA.

Group Shows:

2014 Intimate Stories, A-muse Gallery, San Francisco, USA

2014 Faculty Show, National College of Arts, Lahore

2013 Picture Perfect, Art Chowk, Karachi

2013 Punjab All Artists Association, Al Hamra, Lahore

2012 Punjab All Artists Association (Merit Award), Al Hamra, Lahore

2012 Just Ordinary Tales, VM Art Gallery, Karachi

2011 "How About Today?" Open Studio, Lahore

2011 All Pakistan Young Artist's Exhibition, Al Hamra, Lahore

2003 MA (Hons) Visual Art Degree Show

2002 "International Women's Day" Rohtas II, Lahore and Rohtas, Islamabad

2001 "*Darmiyaan*" Rohtas II, Lahore

2000 2 Person Show, Rohtas Gallery, Islamabad

2000 2 Person Show, Al Hamra Art Gallery, Lahore

2000 "Exhibition of Distinction and Honor Holders", Zahoor ul Ikhlauque Gallery, NCA, Lahore

