



# ساحل کی کہانیاں

**STORIES FROM THE COAST**

**CURATED BY NOORJEHAN BILGRAMI**

A collaborative project by  
**KOEL Gallery and the British Council**



Authorized Service Contractor







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## STORIES FROM THE COAST

CURATED BY NOORJEHAN BILGRAMI

Photographs: Noorjehan Bilgrami  
Cover: Beach Morning Glory (*Ipomoea pes-caprae*)  
growing on the Sea View Beach, Karachi, 2022  
Previous: Mangroves at Khiprianwala Island, 2019

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition  
*Saahil Ki Kahaniyan* – Stories from the Coast  
A collaborative project by KOEL Gallery and the British Council

Published By KOEL Gallery  
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KOEL Gallery and the British Council

August 12 – August 19, 2022

**MAHERA OMAR • MARVI MAZHAR • ABUZAR MADHU • SWALAY MUHAMMAD •  
TAQI SHAHEEN • SARA KHAN PATHAN • ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO • JANAN SINDHU**

# Foreword

British Council, Pakistan

Marking Pakistan's 75th anniversary, the Pakistan-UK Season: New Perspectives explores the connections between the two countries, their contemporary context, their future and shared history. It is a timely recognition and celebration of the artistic excellence that epitomises the UK and Pakistani arts and creative sectors.

The Season is an exciting opportunity to showcase the best of our arts and cultural life, and our successes in creative and technical innovation. The Season theme 'New Perspectives' encapsulates the need for promoting contemporary perspectives and providing professional engagement opportunities within our cultural and educational sectors. The Season facilitates collaborations, focusing on voices from an emerging generation of artists and leaders to create platforms to explore heritage and cultural tourism, with diversity, sustainable creativity, and knowledge economies as cross-cutting themes.

Climate change is one of the main priorities for the Season as it is one of the most urgent global challenges, and particularly affects the Global South. *Saahil Ki Kahaaniyan* – 'Stories from the Coast' aims to raise awareness of climate change on the coastal areas of Pakistan, particularly its fragile Mangrove ecosystem. Through artistic engagement, the project aims to communicate climate issues through diverse artforms and to promote sustainable coastal development. Central to the open call, inviting artists and designers to respond to coastal vulnerabilities, was to engage in meaningful dialogue with local stakeholders including coastal communities, artisans, experts and researchers, highlighting their essential role in the relationship between land, the coast and climate change.

Since February 2022, our project grantees – who were selected by a panel of renowned professionals working across the fields of arts and ecology from the UK, Bangladesh and Pakistan – have explored this theme through a variety of artistic mediums. Through their work, we hope to inform key stakeholders including donors, government, civil society, academia and the public at large of the issue, and influence them in adopting relevant policies aimed at improving conservation efforts and the livelihoods of the fisherfolk.

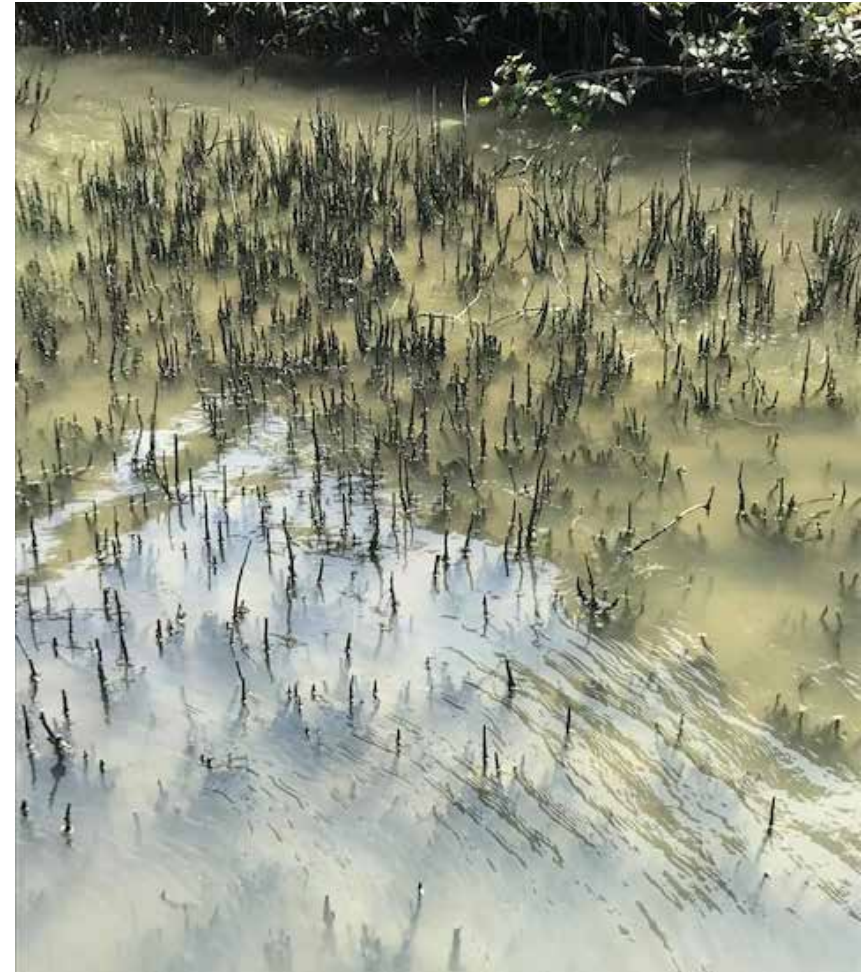
We hope that audiences of this exhibition will uncover new and interesting perspectives and will appreciate the breadth and depth of Pakistan's talent, as well as a deeper understanding and appreciation of climate change issues in Pakistan, particularly those in the coastal areas.

We are immensely proud that the Season has provided a platform for artists, researchers,

curators, thought leaders and members from the fisherfolk community to design and lead these cultural projects on climate change and tell their multifaceted stories in their own words. We are especially thankful to Noorjehan Bilgrami and KOEL Gallery for curating this work. We would also like to thank our partners the Rangoonwala Foundation and UPS for supporting this project.

We sincerely hope that you learn from and enjoy this exhibition.

Laila Jamil, Director Arts Pakistan and Mariya Afzal, Director PK-UK Season



Pneumatophores, small air roots extend vertically from the soil of the Mangrove Tree  
Photograph: Noorjehan Bilgrami, 2019

## Curatorial Note

*Saahil ki Kahaaniyan* – ‘Stories from the Coast’ is a collaborative project by Karachi-based KOEL Gallery and the British Council.

When the British Council asked me to curate an exhibition to celebrate 75 years of Pakistan’s independence for the Pakistan-UK Season, I immediately thought of picking up the strand of an exhibition I initiated for Karachi Biennale in 2019 with five colleagues: “The Mangrove Project– An investigation of the unique coastal ecosystem of Karachi”. The research and experimentation for this exhibition had given us a microcosmic glimpse of our amazing coastal ecology. It needed many lenses to explore the multi layers of the enigmatic, elusive coastline of Pakistan, which has an iconic history and an incredible wealth of life gasping to exist.

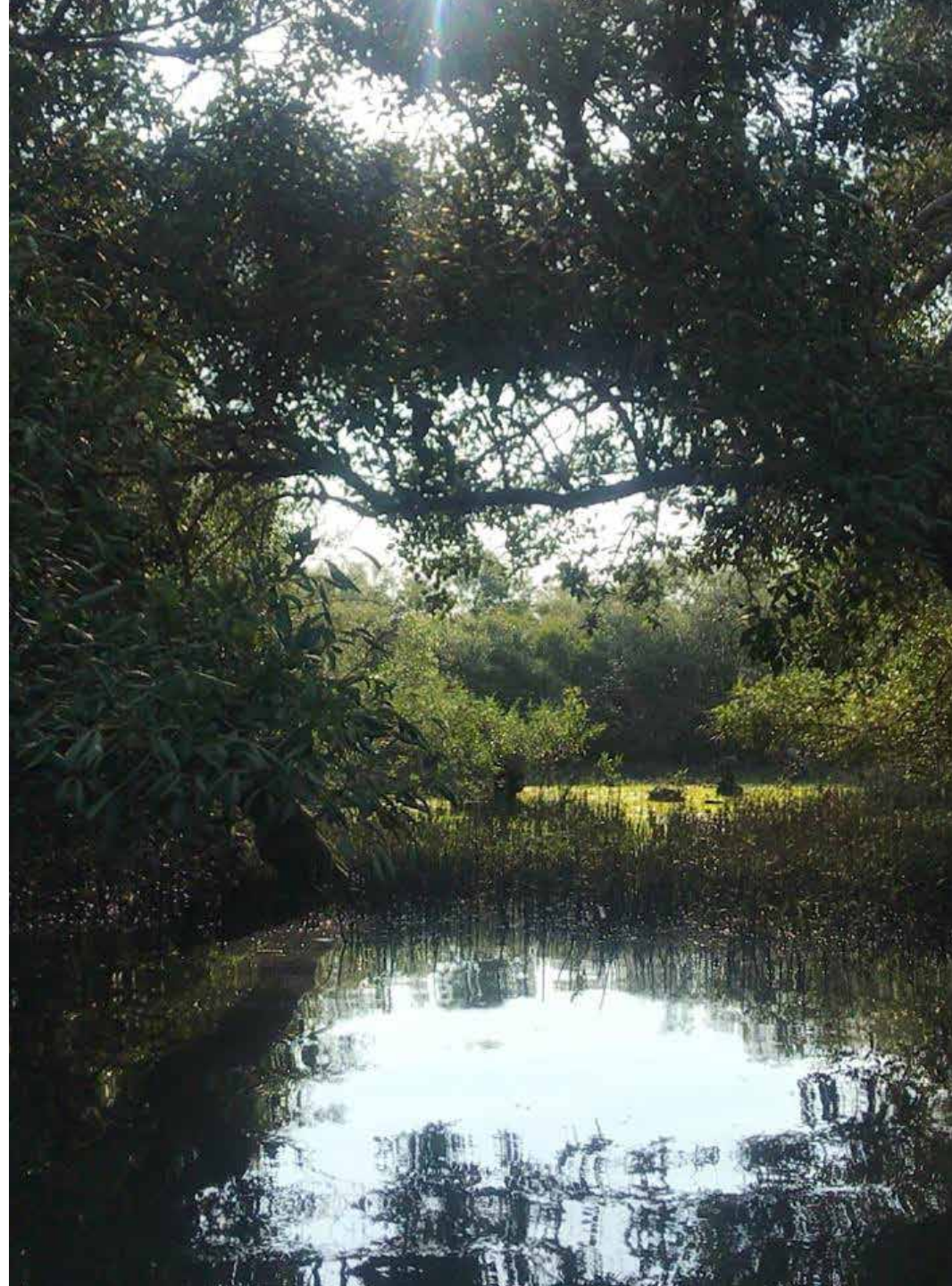
Through illuminating sessions with Mr. Tahir Quraishi, respectfully called Baba-e Mangroves for his central role in the propagation of *timur* (mangroves), we learned how these miracle trees protected our coast and were connected to an entire submerged world in total neglect.

The fabled Sindhu Darya (the Indus River) emerges from Tibet, largely fed by the snows and glaciers of the Karakorum, Hindukush and Himalayan ranges, flows through Ladakh – Baltistan into Gilgit, carrying the glacial waters and flows south in a large delta of 16,000 square miles to merge into the vast Arabian Sea.

The Indus delta has been a nesting ground for migrating water birds and was also rich in freshwater fauna. Fish found in the delta included the *Palla*, a delicacy for people living along the river (Hilsa Ilisha), Indus baril, Indus garua (a catfish), and the giant snakehead. The Blind Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica minor*) is a species found only in the Indus River. The large delta is recognised by conservationists as one of the world’s most important ecological regions. The Indus River is sacred for both Muslims and Hindus and there is a continuity of pilgrimage to holy sites alongside the river. Sadly, diminished ecology and de-forestation of the Indus Basin has made it arid and brought a decline in these treasures today.

The project ‘*Saahil ki Kahaaniyan*’ aims to raise awareness through artistic engagement of the impact of climate change on the coastal areas of Pakistan, particularly its fragile Mangrove Ecosystem, with a view to promoting sustainable coastal development. In February 2022, the project awarded four grants to Pakistan-based artists exploring this

Right: Mangroves at Khiprianwala Island. Photograph: Zarmeene Shah



theme through a variety of mediums, culminating in the curated exhibition. The British Council arranged a diverse Selection Committee to review applications - a process that was quite challenging given the large number of high-quality applications we received. Through a detailed vetting process, four grantees were eventually selected to work on this project:

### 1. Mahera Omar

*'Kabhi aisay bhi hota hai ke kinare doob jate hain...'*

A silent cinematic journey through a delicate wetland ecosystem on the shores of an industrial city, documenting the precious biodiversity which is in grave danger of being lost.

### 2. Marvi Mazhar, Abuzar Madhu & Swalay Muhammad

*'milaap', field notes from where the salt meets the sweet water (work in progress)*

An exploration of the sacred geography of the urban / rural estuary where the river meets the coast, focusing on Khizr, the *darya shah*, whose coordinates are sometimes imaginary on liquid grounds in the form of *astana*, a promised space to protect the coast from climatic and human infrastructural ruptures.

### 3. Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan

*'The Shape of Island'*

A research project to design 'Machi Wachi' - a board game that acts as a storytelling interface for reflection and ecological understanding about scarcity of natural resources around Bhit Island.

### 4. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto & Janan Sindhu

*'Bulhan Nameh'*

A series of immersive installations of fabric and video that speak to the plight of one of Pakistan's shyest animals, the Indus River Dolphin, as well as the communities that have been key to its conservation.

Much more on these grantees and their work is detailed in the pages that follow. Renowned filmmaker **Aisha Gazdar** has also been documenting their journey and is working on a short film.

I am sincerely hoping that these projects through the common platform of *'Saahil ki Kahaaniyan'*, amalgamating at KOEL Gallery will begin the process of collective research that records, investigates and disseminates the awareness of our legacy that needs to be owned, protected and treasured. It is the beginning for exciting work to continue...

I am grateful to the British Council for their support, to Parvinder Marwaha for her vision, to Laila Jamil for making it happen, to Mehreen Shahzad for her excellent organising and our small, dedicated KOEL team.

**Noorjehan Bilgrami**

Edited by Tehmina Ahmed



## Noorjehan Bilgrami

Noorjehan Bilgrami is a visual artist, curator and educationist. She is the Principal Curator for Pakistan Pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020. She curated the Art Project at the new International Airport, Islamabad in 2018. Her atelier KOEL spearheaded the revival of handloom weaving, hand-block printing and the use of natural dyes. KOEL Gallery has been a vibrant platform for new and emerging artists. She was awarded the Japan Foundation Fellowship to research on natural indigo in Japan and curated the exhibition 'Tana Bana: The Woven Soul of Pakistan', which travelled to several countries. She was invited to be the artist in residence at the Islamic Museum of Art, Shangrila Hawaii, and Cicada Press, University of New South Wales, Sydney. A Founder Member of the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi, she has served as its first Executive Director and Chairperson of its Board of Governors. Noorjehan's publications, 'Sindh jo Ajrak' and film 'Sun, Fire, River, Ajrak - Cloth from the Soil of Sindh' document the traditional textile. She has lectured at several universities and museums all over the world.



Detailed study drawing of *Avicennia germinans*- Black Mangrove, Noorjehan Bilgrami, 2019



Aerial view of Indus Delta. Photograph: Nisar Malik



## Selection Committee



### Alon Schwabe & Daniel Fernández Pascual

Alon Schwabe & Daniel Fernández Pascual from Cooking Sections: a duo of spatial practitioners based in London who use installation, performance, mapping and video to explore the systems that organise the world through food.



### Kazi Khaleed Ashraf

Kazi Khaleed Ashraf (also Kazi Ashraf) is an architect, urbanist, architectural historian and critic. He is currently the Director General of Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

### Noorjehan Bilgrami

Curator / Director KOEL Gallery



### Parvinder Marwaha

Design Programme Manager, British Council  
Parvinder builds local and international cultural practices that bridge ethics, design, food and curation. She joined the British Council to curate, programme and commission international projects across architecture, design and fashion in Europe and South Asia.



### Sadia Salim

Sadia Salim is an artist and academic. She established the first Graduate Programme, an interdisciplinary study in critical and creative practice, at Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and led it as Director Graduate Studies for four years. Salim is a recipient of numerous grants and awards, and has participated in and presented at local and international conferences, residencies, and exhibitions.



Ibrahim Hyderi, fishing village. Photograph: Noorjehan Bilgrami, 2019



MAHERA OMAR

*Kabhi aisay bhi hota hai ke kinare doob jate hain...*



## MAHERA OMAR

Mahera Omar is a filmmaker and co-founder of Pakistan Animal Welfare Society, a nonprofit that advocates biodiversity protection, environmental justice and compassion towards sentient beings. Her films have exhibited in Pakistan as well as at international film festivals including at Film South Asia, Istanbul International Architecture and Urban Films Festival and Delhi International Film Festival. Highlights of her filmography include 'Perween Rahman - The Rebel Optimist' and the Dream Journey's musical travelogues. With an abiding interest in Karachi, its environment, plants and animals that share the city with its 20 million inhabitants, she works to document ecosystems that shape Karachi today.

## ***Kabhi aisay bhi hota hai ke kinare doob jate hain...***

Inspired by Rachel Carson's 1955 book *The Edge of the Sea*, my 10 minute film is a cinematic ode to the myriad of marine life at the intertidal mudflats of Karachi.

Between the ebb and flow of Karachi tides, the exposed shoreline is home to a fish that walks on land, the mud crab that clings tenaciously to mangrove tree trunks, the mighty periwinkle, the bubbler crab that spits out sandballs, the long legged egret that fishes, the curlew that stalks fiddler crabs, and the carnivorous marine gastropod mollusks, aka the nudibranchs.

Set against the backdrop of human activity in and around mangrove forest creeks, amidst steaming vessels and a new skyline, the film takes you on a silent journey through a delicate wetland ecosystem on the shores of an industrial city.

Our story begins at a saltwater creek close to the edge of the city with fishermen waiting for the tide to come in and bring in the afternoon's catch. Resting on a mudflat, the wait is long and the under construction skyscrapers dotting the coast loom over their line of sight.

Across the creek on an island strewn with the city's flotsam and jetsam, a marine snail goes about its business blissfully unaware of plans to create a new city on its habitat. To the west, fishing villages along the coast are sheltered from the sea by meandering creeks surrounded by a fast disappearing mangrove forest. Deep inside the forest, the nudibranch creeps up the roots waiting for the tide, the crab catcher leaves his wooden boat stuck in the mud, prodding for the elusive large crab to sell to fancy seafood restaurants.

The images of coastal life speak for themselves and will hopefully tug at your heartstrings in raising your voice for marginalised communities.

Experts warn that rising sea levels could submerge Karachi by 2060. The current shoreline supports marine life that is the livelihood of the local fisherfolk community. By documenting hidden nature and human activity along the coast, the film highlights the importance of preserving the health of our precious wetland ecosystems.

I have been exploring the mangrove forest of Karachi for the past many years and have experienced the beauty of the creeks and their importance for the city's residents. In order to make this film, I shortlisted locations of the forest where the trees are cut down, where sewage is released from, and the fishing villages and mudflats on which to film.

Making this film has been important for me as I wish to document precious biodiversity which we are in grave danger of losing altogether. The film will hopefully resonate with audiences both local and international as coastal cities all over the world face a similar crisis of climate change, rising seas and biodiversity loss.

These once pristine mangrove creeks and the marine life they support bear the brunt of human waste in the form of toxic industrial and domestic sewage, as well as overfishing, hunting and reckless land reclamation. The health of this ecosystem with all its creatures small and large, and the preservation of the city's coastal landscape is critical to our very survival.

This short observational and poetic art film is a quiet, slow-paced reflection on the state of the city's coastline with only natural sound accompanying the images. There are no talking heads or voice of narration. The marine creatures at the water's edge and the activity of the fisherfolk community drive the story and allow the audience to make up their own minds about their city by the sea.



## Karachi's Mangrove Forest

Just off the coast of Karachi city is a series of interconnected saltwater creeks lined with an extensive mangrove forest ecosystem. These delicate wetlands are home to marine biodiversity as diverse as the lugworm on the intertidal mudflats to flocks of pelicans and pink flamingoes in the winter. Each of these species is intricately connected to each other in the web of life, as are the fisherfolk community that depend on the forest for their livelihood.

Karachi is home to three species of mangroves, with *Avicennia Marina* being the most abundant. Its air breathing roots jut out from the mudflats, keeping them stable in the strongest of stormy weather. The forest canopy, if allowed to reach its natural potential, can reach dizzying heights of up to 10 metres and is a carbon store and source of oxygen for the megacity.

Unfortunately, much of the precious natural heritage with which Karachi is blessed is neither protected nor declared a national park. Its resources are plundered with impunity thanks to commercial logging, land reclamation and illegal wildlife trade that is depleting biodiversity and disrupting forest health. The relentless release of untreated raw sewage and industrial waste has wreaked havoc on the mudflats, with toxins accumulating up the food chain from the fish and the mud crabs to us humans.

Our own survival as a species depends on the existence of healthy ecosystems around us. Mangroves are nurseries for fish and shrimp, as well as a barrier against storms and cyclones. Scientists have warned us for decades about rising global sea levels and their impact on coastal cities such as Karachi. In this day and age, instead of dealing with the ongoing climate crisis, it is madness to dream of building new cities on highly vulnerable mudflat islands, further endangering them in the name of 'progress'.

As it is, Karachi's coast has over the years lost much of its once extensive mangrove forest to urban development. Whatever is left of it is a haven for marine biodiversity and the fisherfolk community, the city's original coastal inhabitants. A nature-led process of ecosystem restoration is the need of the hour in order to protect the wetland creeks from further wanton destruction. In time the forest will regenerate, creating a wilder Karachi and benefitting the health and well-being of future generations of residents.

Right: Speckled afternoon light reflects off the branches of a mature mangrove tree inundated by the rising tide at Janro creek just off the coast of Karachi. Photograph: Mahera Omar



The remains of a sea urchin on the shores of Bundal Island.



Sea snails on the intertidal mudflats of Khiprianwala Island.



The burrows of tiny marine crabs are hardened in the summer sun on a dry mud bank of Kainri creek.



On Bundal Island during low tide, small crustaceans such as this crab venture out of their burrows to feed, ready to dart back at a moment's notice at the first sign of danger.



Buddo Island is home to a variety of marine creatures, including this jellyfish that lies motionless on the shore in the receding tide.

Photographs: Mahera Omar



MARVI MAZHAR, ABUZAR MADHU & SWALAY MUHAMMAD

milaap مِلَاط

*field notes from where the salt meets the sweet water*

[work in progress]



Architect Marvi Mazhar at Baba Island documenting net making

## MARVI MAZHAR

Marvi Mazhar is a Karachi-based architect and researcher whose practice combines visual culture, spatial advocacy and interventions. Currently, she is an amicus curie for the High Court of Sindh working on Karachi's ecological emergencies, as her present ongoing research focuses upon the representation and production of Karachi's Urban Coastal Periphery and its Ecology.



Researcher Swalay Muhammad interviewing fishermen at Bhambhore



Performing Artist Abuzar Madhu on the boat in Punjnad filming the journey of understanding the river

## ABUZAR MADHU

Abuzar Madhu is a Punjab-based performing artist. His work centres on decolonising the body and mind by facilitating embodied knowledge and connection to culture and the land. For the last eight years, he has worked with Sangat Theater Group, using theater as an activism tool in local communities. Abuzar is currently completing his Master's in Cultural Studies from NCA, where he is researching the relationship expressed in folk poetry between the local communities that live on Ravi River and the river itself. He is also exploring the impact of colonisation on this relationship and how this has changed the way communities presently live and relate to Ravi River.

## SWALAY MUHAMMAD

Swalay Muhammad is a third-generation fisherman from Baba Island. He works part-time as a Level 08 Google Local Guide where he works on local narrative-based short stories through his YouTube channel.

Previous spread: Salt pans at Bhambhore Ghari creek

milaap ملاپ

## *field notes from where the salt meets the sweet water*

[work in progress]

Sacred is often described in the context of religious beliefs or tradition, in a rural and marginal context. Yet according to environmentalist Divya Gopal, 'sacredness' exists in a modern, contemporary, urban context and plays an important role for maintaining ecosystem services for the benefit of people in the city. Since the notion of sacredness can be interpreted beyond religious beliefs and traditional cultures, but also serve as a reminder in the form of memory and continuity of historical social ecological interactions.

The redevelopment of the coast from elite gated communities to military occupancy has created limitations and the mobility of fishermen is difficult. Urban interventions, upscaling and the creation of zones as corporate enclaves have created social injustice and disparity. When these events are witnessed one questions the development of future projects. Imagining shrines and communities in the urban sprawl, in spatial and temporal terms, "all narratives are really the unfolding of events in time" (Aldama, 202:90) and according to Ghosh, "the dense layering of history is what makes this place possible, that gives it a location, makes it continually surprising." Are indigenous lands protected or have infrastructural decisions led to displacement; just like the fish which can't pay homage to Khizr, the fishermen community cannot access the coastal saints?

In Ecological Epistemologies III (on going conversation): we as field companions like to work on the sacred geography of the urban / rural estuary where the sweet water (river) meets the salt (coast). We would like to start by exploring extraction of natural resources, capitalistic pursuits, environmental degradation and impacts on water, soil and air, and its effects on indigenous communities in the Delta. Looking specifically at understanding 'salt' through two aspects: man-made salt pans and the global crisis of sea water level increasing, leaving the wasteland in the delta with a high level of saltwater table in green pastures.

Right: Saint Khizer's Astana at Mubarak village

*Stories from the Coast*





خالق خلق مانہ ، خلق وسے رب ما نہہ  
مندا کس ٹوں اکھہے جد تڈھ بن کوئی ناتہہ  
(بابا فرید)

اساڈی اتھاویں فقیری ریت ملن دی ریت ہے ، ملاون دی ریت ہے۔۔۔ جیہڑی رب تے مخلوق نوں پک کر وکھاوندی  
اے۔۔۔ ملواندی اے۔۔۔ ایہہ دسدی اے جو رُکھ، دھرتی، پانی، ہوا ، جنور ، انسان، وکھو وکھ نہیں۔۔۔ پک مخلوق نہیں۔۔۔  
تے ایہاں سبھ وچ رب موجود اے۔۔۔ او وی وکھرا نہیں۔۔۔ پانی ، دھرتی ، رُکھ وچ وی اوہ اوبناں ای حاضر اے  
،جناں انساناں وچ۔۔۔ ایس لئی اتھاویں لوکائی پانی تے دھرتی ٹوں جیوندی تے مقدس بستیاں میندیاں  
آئیاں۔۔۔ پک محاورا اے لوک بولی وچ " جتھ اب ہے اوتھ آب ہے "۔۔۔ یعنی جتھے پانی ہے اوتھے رب ہے۔۔۔ پر  
مالکی ملکیت دا ورتارا وجوگ دا ورتارا اے۔۔۔ تے دھرتی تے جئی دی مالکی جیہڑی ہزاراں سالان توں ٹری ا رہی  
سی ، ایسے وجوگ دا ای پک انگ سی۔۔۔ کپیٹلزم جیہڑا ایس مالکی دا نواں روپ ہے تے وجوگ تے کھلوتا اے ، اوہ  
کل قدرت دھرتی، پانی، ہوا، جنور تے انساناں ٹوں پک وست دے طور دے ویکھدا اے۔۔۔ اک کھوجکار "احسن  
کمال اکھدے نیں" جو ڈیمز تے بیراجز راہ نیں دریا تے قبضے دا ۔۔۔ دریا تے ایہہ نویں قبضہ گیری انگریز کالونی  
گیراں دے ویلے وچ شروع ہوئی۔۔۔ تے اج اندرونی کالونی گیراں ڈیمز تے بیراجز راہیں کیویں دریاواں دی کل

بستی ٹوں مکا چھڈیا اے۔۔۔ اسیں اپنی ایس کھوج وچ ویکھ رہے اں جو کیویں دریاواں دی مکمل قبضہ گیری ہوئی  
ہوئی ملن دی سکت ٹوں مکا رہی اے۔۔۔ دریا سُک رہے نیں۔۔۔ بیٹ مُک گئے نیں۔۔۔ زہر ہونڈے جا رہے پانی۔۔۔  
سُکے دریاواں دی زمیناں تے قبضے ہو رہے۔۔۔ دریا دی زمیناں تے سوسائٹیز بن رہیاں۔۔۔ کل بستی دریا دی ڈکھ  
وچ ہے۔۔۔ دریاواں دا نہ ایسی پورا ملن ہے تے نہ مٹ سمندر نال۔۔۔ ڈیلٹا سُکڑ گیا۔۔۔ کھارا پانی آگے ودھ رہیا ۔۔۔ ایہہ  
کھار کدھرے غصہ تے نہیں پانی دا، جیہڑا ملن نہ ہون پاروں ہے۔۔۔  
پر چیتے وچ وگدے دریاواں دے لوک گیت تے خواج خضر ، تے کدھرے خواجہ دل دریا دے ناں دیاں دُعاواں تے  
سہرے آجے وی راہ سُجھا رہے کوئی۔۔۔ جے سنیے تاں کن لا کے۔۔۔



Field image: witnessing salinity in the soil as form of remaining residue

Translation:

Our local Faqeri tradition is the tradition of Oneness (Milaap). The Faqeri tradition (mendicancy) reflects the 'unity' of Divine creation with divinity itself. This tradition regards nature (trees, earth, water, air and animals) and humans as inseparable beings that are bound together and co-exist in a unity and oneness without any hierarchies of power based on the presence of divine elements.

This human-nature relationship where water possesses divine elements is the reason why indigenous people have always considered water and earth as holy beings. A translated proverb from the native language reads as, 'where there is water, there is you', which means where there is water, there is divinity. However, this spiritual element of water has been compromised by modern notions of alienation appropriated by ownership and capitalism that separates nature from human beings, disregarding the Faqeri tradition of unity and oneness. Historical evidence suggests that the control of land and women for thousands of years also reflects this alienation. Modernity builds a centralised notion of human beings, creating a segregation of human and nature that results in an objectification of nature to satiate capitalist motives. Using a theoretical enclosure lens, researcher Ahsan Kamal argues that humans and nature have been turned into objects to fit

into cycles of capitalist production and changed the human-river relationship into that of society-state. The colonisation of rivers that started during the British colonial period, and later extended as internal colonisation in the form of rivers and barrages has disrupted the lives of rivers.

This research focuses on this changed relationship with the river where its spiritual and divine properties have been forgotten in the backdrop of modernity and coloniality. It investigates how the modern forms of colonisation of rivers have disregarded their ability and potential of union, resulting in dried rivers, loss of biodiversity, toxicity of water, and loss of river land to the housing societies. The union of rivers with each other and with the seas has been affected resulting in shrunken deltas. The lack of this union has made the river's anger to advance its saline water. However, there exists a memory of water that reminds of flowing water's music, of Khawaja Khizr, and the prayers embellished with the name of Khwaja Dull are suggesting solutions that demand our attention.

Artists & Researchers: Marvi Mazhar, Abuzar Madhu & Swalay Muhammad

Companions & Allies: Ahmed Hasan Khan, Sameen Waseem, Kiran Ahmad, Saba Warraich, Khadim Hussain Kharral, Dr. Farhat Abbas, students of Mehmood Nizami



Salt rocks formation at Harjina Salt Pans in Bhambhore, crossing Gharo creek

*Slow violence is delayed violence and its effects are only visible after a while. Our work on the sacred geography of the urban / rural estuary where the river (sweet water) meets the coast (salt water) is work in progress where the lens of extraction of natural resources, capitalistic pursuits, environmental degradation and impacts on decrease in water flow down the Indus, siltation which prevents seawater from intruding inland by creating a raised shoreline, and air and its effects on indigenous life-making projects in encounters with extractivism in the Delta looking specifically at understanding salt through two aspects: man-made salt pans and the global crisis of sea water level increasing, leaving the wasteland in the delta with a high level of saltwater table in green pastures. We locate ourselves in between Delta and South of Punjab to understand salt, and its relation to the land and water through an ethnographic exploration.*



TAQI SHAHEEN & SARA KHAN PATHAN

*The Shape of Island*



## TAQI SHAHEEN

Taqi Shaheen is an artist and filmmaker whose work crosses mediums to create curious observations on contemporary sub-cultures, alternate histories and mediascapes. He uses transmedia formats to research and construct non-fictional narratives through films, exhibitions and publications. His non-fiction works include 'Afterimage: a VR Experience', 'Subjective Atlas of Pakistan' (Oxford University Press, 2020), 'Drawn Attack', 'Lessons on Lessons', 'The Petman Girls', 'Whose Pakistan is it anyway?' and an animated short film 'Congregation of the Distressed'.

## SARA KHAN PATHAN

Sara Khan Pathan is a multidisciplinary artist and educator. As a visual artist, book illustrator and animator, her art is born from her resolute devotion to Pakistan, exploring cartography, nature, impacts of violence, and socio-political complexities of displacement. Her recent projects include ideation and curation for Chalta Phirta Museum for State Bank of Pakistan featuring tactual art for the visually impaired based on master painter Sadequain's works, and a collaborative cookbook project featuring South Asian food, heritage and culture. She is a Fine Arts and Islamic Arts painting instructor and senior thesis advisor at the Visual Studies Department, University of Karachi.

## TAQI SHAHEEN & SARA KHAN PATHAN

Since 2014, as a collective, Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan have been researching the ecology of Bhit Island and how it is constructed, negotiated and decided upon collectively within the place of local community. Their collaborative research anchors itself on empathy, love and understanding of indigenous fisherfolk communities of Karachi, its multigenerational histories and coastal conditions using art, design, educational formats, films, storytelling and interactive media. As part of their ongoing research, Taqi and Sara have been developing creative tools of learning about the island's ecology and how alternative futures can be imagined and reinvented in close collaboration with the residents of the island.



## The Shape of Island

Our research project reimagines the idea of a utopian island through unpublished testimonies and multigenerational stories of the indigenous fisherfolk communities of Bhit Island using archives, maps and personal conversations with the islanders. These conversations and stories provided us multiple pathways to learn from eyewitnesses across time about the genealogies of circumstances that have shaped the lives of the residents and the island itself.

Unlike any dream holiday destination island, Bhit Island is a mystery. Over populated, with very few means of livelihood, no water or electricity for days and no health facilities. But for the islanders: “It’s Singapore! It just rained for four hours and you don’t see any water like you do in Karachi, do you?” one of the residents asked us. “The city people don’t even know what real fish tastes like.” We agreed. “They are making a new artificial island for us next to our island, and soon we all will move there in our multi-story apartments. And we will be happy!” Many other anecdotes, stories, and audio visual recordings were transformed into a map of coastal community, situational illustrations and 3D objects to create a multi-player environmental strategy board game, Machi Wachi. The board game acts as a storytelling interface for reflection and ecological understanding about scarcity of natural resources around the island due to excessive dredging, sea level rise, deforestation, oil spills, overfishing, coastal erosion, terrors of technology, real estate dreams and short-term development goals.

بہاڑ عمر وں پر سوار بیٹھے ہیں  
سوار خاک ہیں بے اختیار بیٹھے ہیں  
آراو

In Machi Wachi, players take the future of the island into their hands. Their main task is to survive while accumulating natural resources responsibly. To succeed, players must collect resources in the form of fish, water, fuel, ice and sea wall that will allow them to explore sea routes, catch fish and survive calamities. The game components include a map of the island, Rahat Kada (Utopia) and Afat Kada (Dystopia) situational cards, character cards with responsibility hierarchies on ship, a survival dice with weather conditions, and a traverse board inspired from ancient navigation tools and record keeping techniques used by sailors to keep track of their sea routes. These components connect the players with their own utopian aspirations and dystopian futures to navigate various socio-ecological forces at play, as an active participant within the fisherfolk community.



Mapping Bhit, Size: 22” x 24”

Water Color, Tea Wash, Gouache and Gold on paper, Sara Khan Pathan (2022)



The Crew, Size: 2.22” x 3.11” Digital Print on Art Paper.

Card Design and Cover Illustration by Rawaz Hammas. Character Portraits by Sara Khan Pathan. Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan (2022)

Testing out the game with the residents and local politicians brought out more stories that would otherwise remain completely lost, since they are missing from conventional discourse, documentation and research on coastal communities. We hope that, through this ongoing research and board game, the stories of our collective vulnerabilities will help us reconfigure our ecological worldview, values and mindset towards an invisible apocalypse staring at us.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the people of Bhit for their hospitality, support and cooperation during our research, especially Feroz, Badaruddin Saab and his family, Owais Malai, Sakina Bibi, Abdul Hameed Sheikh, Arif Hasan, Sara's parents, Sana Khan, Rawaz Hammas, Kashif Kamal, Nabeel Khan, Aan Abbas, Junaid Vohra, Hamza Sadiq, Muzzamil Arif, Dr. Asad Shehzad, Urban Resource Centre (URC), Noorjehan Bilgrami for her vision and guidance, and the British Council for their generous support.

**Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan**



Playtests with kids, Bhit Island (2022)



**Rahat Kada (Utopia) & Afat Kada (Dystopia)**, Size: 2.12" x 2.37" Digital Print on Art Paper.

Cards Design and Cover Illustration by Rawaz Hammas Back Cover.

Illustrations by Sara Khan Pathan. Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan (2022)



**Machi Wachi : The Environmental Strategy Board Game.** Board Game installation with mangroves, fish & water tokens, and game pieces. Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan (2022)



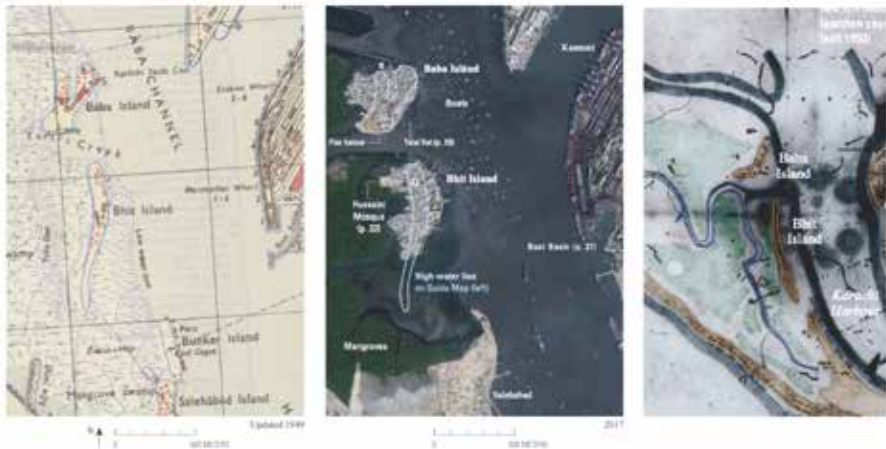
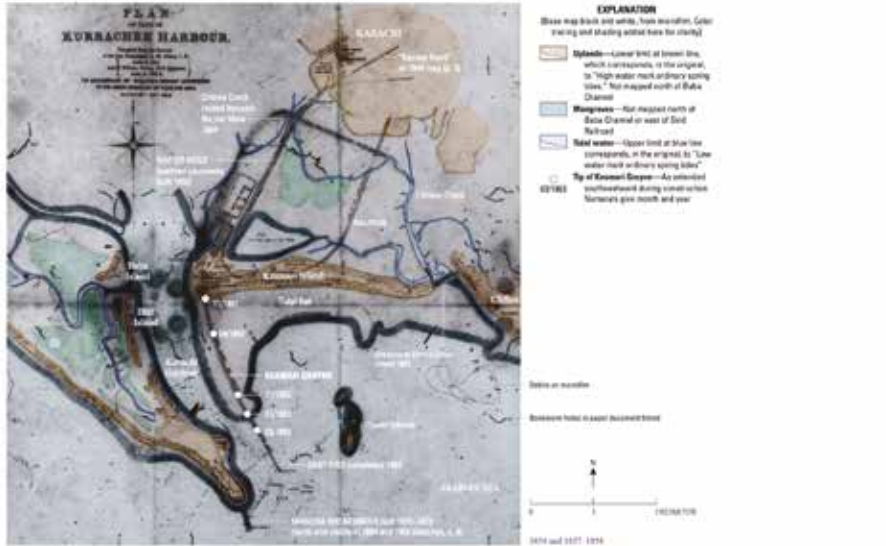
**Survival Dice for Emergent Occasions.** Size: 3" x 3" (Dodecahedron). Engraved Leather. Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan (2022)



**Traverse Board for Lost Souls** Size: Diameter 4.5" Engraved Beech Wood and needles. Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan (2022)



**The Islanders** Size: 1" x 0.50" Rosewood. Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan (2022)



Selected Archival Maps, Bhit (1800s, 1949 & 2007)



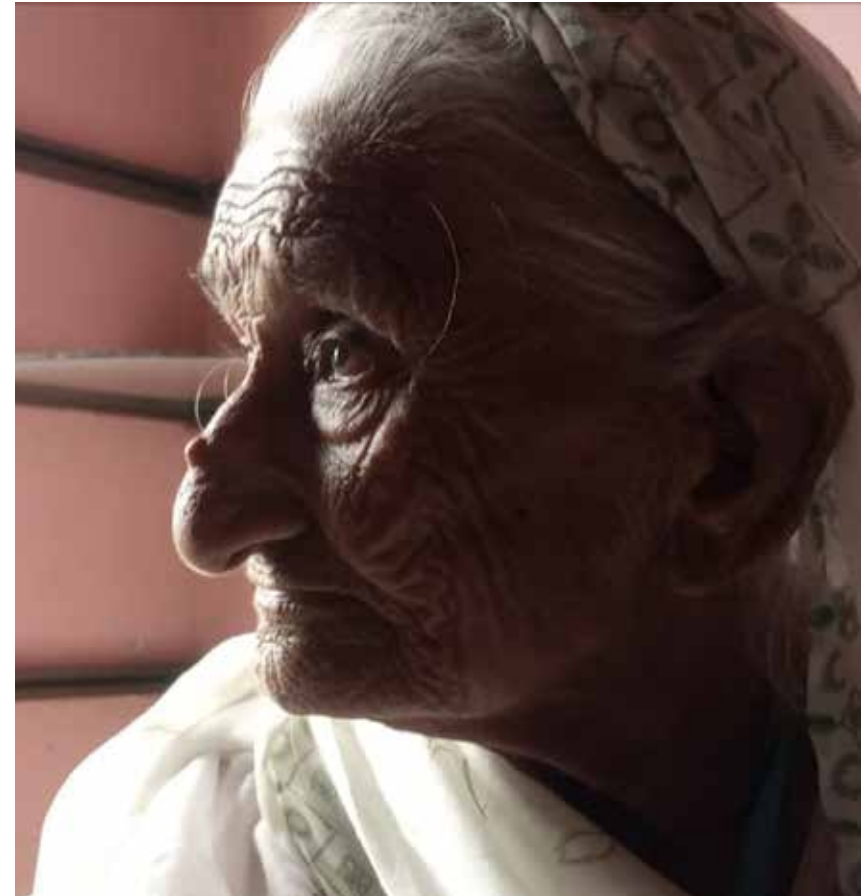
The Shape of Island, A Silent Film, 5 min  
 Video Projection on Gallery Wall  
 Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan (2022)

*We play games  
You and I and they  
Play at reconciling what is irreconcilable  
Agreeing on irrelevant details and grand concepts  
But glossing over love and understanding  
That the concepts embody  
We play games  
You and I and they  
To preserve our little domains  
And prevent them from blossoming  
Into flowers that will free the world  
Of you and I and they  
We play games  
You to survive and I to negotiate your survival  
And they to plunder us both.*

Arif Hasan (Karachi, 22 February, 1989)



Playtests with boys in a video game centre, Bhit Island (2022)



**Tales from the Past**

Sakina Bibi, 92, Bhit Island

Audio conversations with subtitles, 6 min

Taqi Shaheen & Sara Khan Pathan (2022)





ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO & JANAN SINDHU

*Bulhan Nameh*



**Dammed**, 7 piece installation, Cyanotype on cotton, Size: Varying Dimensions, 2022



Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Janan Sindhu at Satian Jo Asthan

## ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (b. Damascus, 1990) is an artist and curator whose work resurrects complex histories in the South Asian, South West Asian and North African region. In the process he unpacks the intersections of religion, storytelling, futurity and environmental degradation through a multi-media practice rooted in printmaking, traditional textile art and performance. Bhutto has spoken at Columbia University, UC Berkeley, NYU, Stanford and IVS. Bhutto is currently based in Karachi, Pakistan and received an MAH in History of Art from the University of Edinburgh in 2014 and an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2016.

## JANAN SINDHU

Janan Sindhu has been Working as independent film director and producer since 2018. Hailing from Khipro in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh, Sindhu's work has been focusing on the relationship of the ecological and the social. His most recent documentary 'Bulhan: The Blind Dolphin' sheds light on the Indus River Dolphin.

**Previous Spread:** Ellahi, Mirani, Pillari, Cyanotype on Khaddar, Mirror Work and Various Threads, Size: 7' 4" x 3', 2022

## Bulhan Nameh

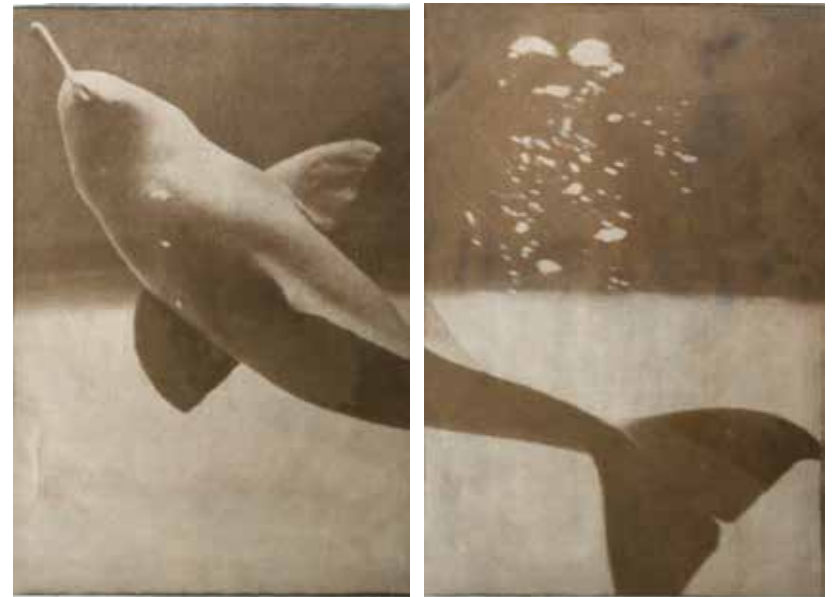
*Bulhan Nameh* is a long term research based project that looks at a selection of sites on the River Indus between Sukkur and Rohri in Sindh, Pakistan. Taking its name from the Sindhi word for the Indus River Dolphin, *bulhan*, this series intends to look at how this 10 km long stretch has been at the centre of ecological and historical change downstream. The furthest end of this site area is punctuated by the British era Sukkur Barrage, built in 1932, that would almost immediately shrink the historic delta to a fraction of its original size. At the the other end of this site is the island shrine of Khwaja Khizr, known locally to Hindus and Muslims as Zinda Pir, and in the middle is Pakistan's largest concentration of 2,000 River Dolphins. Here wildlife, history and spirituality collide with colonialism, capitalism and feudalism, as well as the ever more present modern state, which continues to plan increasingly aggressive water storage policies upstream that will deprive Sindh and Pakistan's coastal areas of much needed fresh and brackish water.

In this particular installment of *Bulhan Nameh*, textile artist, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto teams up with filmmaker Janan Sindhu to create immersive installations of fabric and video that speak to the plight of one of Pakistan's shyest animals, the Indus River dolphin, as well as the communities that have been key to its conservation. Former fisherman Nazir Mirani alongside a rather rare book: 'Secrets of the Blind Dolphin', written by Giorgio Pilleri, becomes the focus of our works. Mirani's family belongs to a tribe of people known as the Jabbars, one of 150 boat tribes who spent their entire lives on the river, rarely ever coming ashore. The Jabbar tribe at one time hunted the Indus Dolphin for its oil, used to coat boats to make them waterproof and as an ailment for muscle soreness – it should be noted that it in fact has no medicinal value whatsoever. Today this community has been crucial in the fight to save this species from extinction.

The two major forces behind the conservation of this species are the Sindh Wildlife Department – which Mirani is an employee of – and WWF. Sukkur Barrage draws billions of cusecs of water out of the Indus into what many consider to be the largest canal irrigation system in the world, completed in 1932 by the British occupation and funded most enthusiastically by Sindhi landlords, merchants and philanthropists. Following fish, their main prey, dolphins will take advantage of the expanded habitat. In January these canal gates close, leaving them stranded. The Sindh Wildlife Department regularly rescues these dolphins to place back in the river – while WWF has been providing tracker systems to understand the dolphins' movement patterns and to potentially find them quickly should they end up stranded. Through the sale of the works in this exhibition we hope to raise enough money to buy one if not more trackers – each can be upwards of \$2,000 – as well as raise funds for Mirani and



Nazir Mirani, *Father of the Dolphins*, Documentary still, 5 mins, 2022



Blowing Bubbles, Diptych, Green tea stained cyanotype prints on Khaddar, 11" x 17" each, 2022

his family to continue to sustain their conservation in a rapidly changing world.

In the late 1960s, it was Mirani's father and two brothers, who kept a small school of river dolphins in a pond attached to the river's mainstream for an entire year for a Swiss Scientist, Dr. Giorgio Pilleri to study at a time when massive irrigation projects, barrages and dams led everyone to believe the Indus River Dolphin had become extinct. Pilleri decided to take two of these dolphins with him to Berne, Switzerland enlisting the help of the Mirani clan who captured the dolphins, placed them in stretchers and loaded them into trains for Karachi. In Karachi, they were placed in the swimming pool of the Midway Hotel and then loaded onto flights to Zurich. While the dolphins survived the trip they died only a few months into captivity, proving what we know too well that dolphins - river or marine - simply cannot survive outside of their natural habitat.

Though cruel by today's standards, it was Pilleri's research that led to the only book in existence on the Indus River Dolphin: 'Secrets of the Blind Dolphin' and even more importantly laid the foundation for what we know about them, and it was Mirani's family that facilitated this. This research further informed the Pakistani government in 1972 to make the Indus River Dolphin a protected species and an Indus dolphin reserve was created for their protection between Guddu and Sukkur Barrages where 1,400 out of 2,000 dolphins live today.

Through textile and video installations, Sindhu and Bhutto jump back and forth between the personal and the political. They weave together Mirani's story with that of Pilleri, the dolphins he captured, the dolphins that exist today in Pakistan and the ever looming presence of Sukkur Barrage. The barrage becomes a divisive and unifying force; it is one of many physical divisions that has segmented the dolphins' habitat and it draws out billions of cusecs of water from the Indus River which has in turn led to a drastic reduction in the health of the river all the way down to its delta.



Dammed, 7 piece installation, Cyanotype on cotton, Size: Varying Dimensions, 2022



Dammed, 7 piece installation, Cyanotype on cotton, Size: Varying Dimensions, 2022

## Statement 1879 - 2022

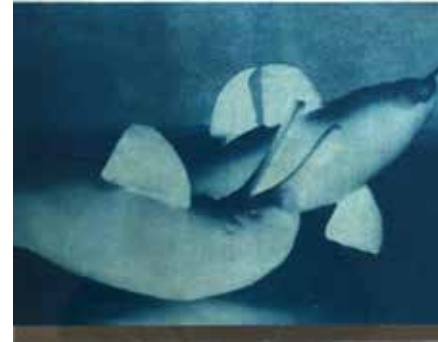
In 1879, a British zoologist named John Anderson took a keen interest in South Asian river dolphins and sent letters across departments along the Indus drainage basin to identify how many dolphins there approximately were. Sightings were reported in all of Punjab's six rivers (including the Beas) and even smaller rivers and streams that joined the Indus, dolphins were seen in the Ravi in Lahore and even as far north as Murree. There was a reported abundance (actual figures we do not have) of dolphins in a 3,500 km range.

In the preceding years the British undertook a series of irrigation projects, starting with the Madhopur Barrage on the Ravi as early as 1879; they would continue to build 12 more with the largest being Sukkur Barrage completed in 1932. The final blow was a World Bank Funded network of mega projects begun in the early 1950s and completed in the early 1970s, including Tarbela Dam, Mangla Dam, Guddu Barrage and Kotri Barrage. In 1969 it was believed that the Indus River Dolphin had become extinct and had it not been for the keen interest of local fishermen and a Swiss scientist named Giorgio Pilleri, they likely would have been.

In 1972, with the creation of the Sindh Wildlife Department and the protection of this species, the population of dolphins went up from 120 individuals to 2,000 according to the 2017 Indus Dolphin survey - a nearly 20 fold increase in a fifty year period. Their habitat is extremely constrained today with all dolphins living in a 750 km stretch of the Indus River.

This piece 1879-2022 uses an image from Dr. Pilleri's book 'Secrets of the Blind Dolphin', which is printed multiple times through a process of sun printing known as Cyanotype. The images are further manipulated, going from extremely dark indigo blues, sky blues, yellows, whites and greyish browns through carefully controlling exposure times, as well as bleaching and dyeing with green tea. The resulting visual effect is a dark image that washes out and then begins to re-emerge, reminding us of a unique species that was nearly lost to time. With water issues on the rise again in Sindh, the position of the Indus River Dolphin once again remains incredibly vulnerable.

Research for this piece was obtained from Dr. Gill Braulick's paper 'Conservation Ecology and Phylogenetics of the Indus River Dolphin (Platanista Gangetica Minor) 2012 and Dr. Giorgio Pilleri's 'Secrets of the Blind Dolphin' 1980.



1879 Madhopur, Cyanotype on Khaddar, 11" x 17", 2022



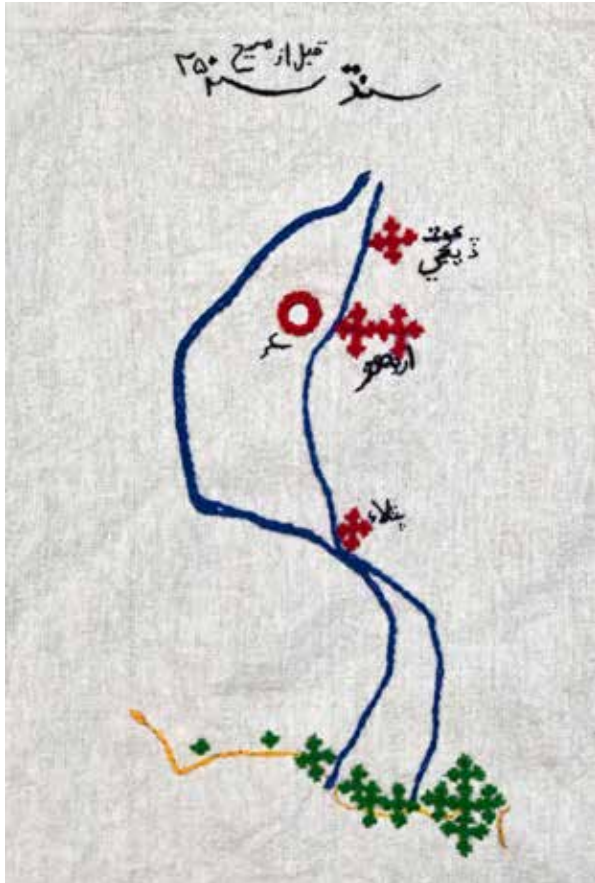
1892 to 1917 Khanki Rashul Baloki, Cyanotype on Khaddar, 11" x 17", 2022



2022 Othla Jabba Jalozaï Dadocha, Green Tea Stained Cyanotype on Khaddar, 11" x 17", 2022



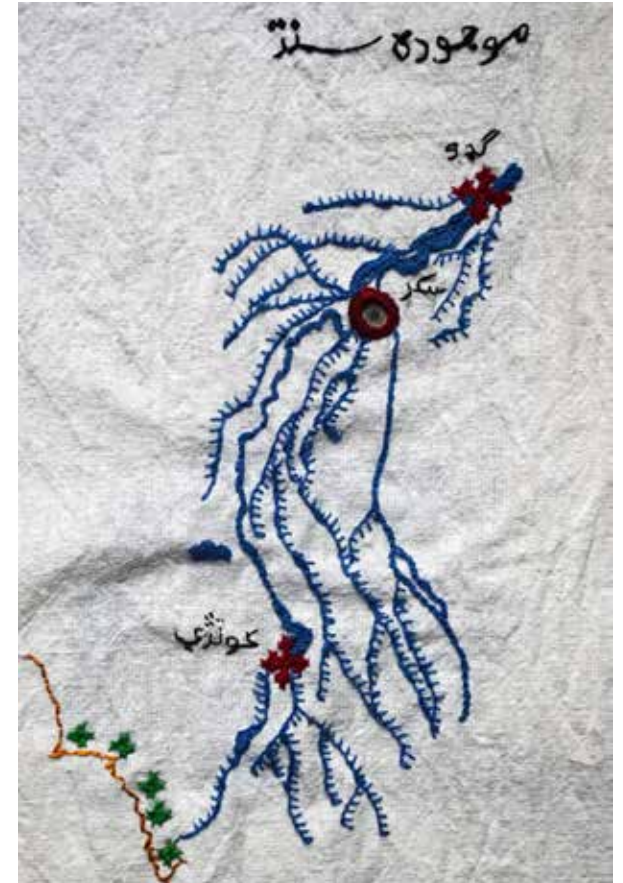
1932 Sukkur, Bleached Cyanotype on Khaddar, 11" x 17", 2022



Sindh 250 BCE  
Embroidery and mirror work  
on khaddar fabric  
11" x 17", 2021



Sindh 750 AD  
Embroidery and mirror work  
on khaddar fabric  
11" x 17", 2021



Modern Sindh  
Embroidery and mirror work  
on khaddar fabric  
11" x 17", 2021



## AISHA GAZDAR

Aisha Gazdar works under the banner of Films d'Art ([www.filmsdart.com](http://www.filmsdart.com)), an independent film production company based in Karachi. Her work focuses on human rights and social issues, especially women's rights. Her award winning films include 'The Honour Deception' a short documentary on Honour Killings and the complications arising out of the Qisas and Diyat Law (Law of Retribution). The film won the best documentary award – jury at the 2nd Shorts Delhi International Film Festival 2013. Her film 'Silent Voices: Women home based workers in Pakistan' won the best documentary award at the Canadian Labour International Film Festival in 2010 and 'The Last Day: A True Story of a Hibakusha' got a Special Jury Mention at Kara Film Festival.



## My impressions working on *Saahil Ki Kahaaniyan*

For me working on a film means to always take a deep dive in the theme or subject I am exploring. This time it was an added pleasure because the dive was literally into the known and unknown. The artists featured here have picked up diverse stories relating to the coast, the sea, the river and humanity and yet there is a seamless connection running through them all which I have attempted to show. From looking for Khizr (the wise saint of the waters) to the protection of the Indus River Dolphin which is as crucial for humankind's health as is the protection of the ecology around Karachi's coasts and its mud banks which are a source of sustenance to our indigenous communities. The challenges they face, the strategies they adopt that can be seen and experienced through a board game. All these connections, I hope, make the viewers realise their importance to our own survival- from the microcosm to the macro.

Another interesting thing to me was how all the artists worked independently and yet they seem part of a whole, like the oneness of nature. I sincerely hope this work continues because when art is socially conscious it is elevated to another level.

A big thanks to Noorjehan Bilgrami for making this happen and for seeing the bigger picture.

Next spread: Red Shanks take flight over Karachi's Bundal island. Photograph: Taimur Mirza





A top-down photograph of a sandy beach. The sand is a light, textured grey-brown. Scattered across the surface are approximately 15-20 white Venus clams. Some are closed, showing their characteristic rounded, ribbed shells. Others are open, revealing a pale, almost white interior. The clams are in various orientations. Interspersed among the clams are several bird footprints, which are shallow impressions in the sand, some showing distinct toe patterns. The overall scene suggests a natural, undisturbed coastal environment.

and thus life continues...

White Venus Clams and bird footprints on Karachi's seafont.  
Photograph: Noorjehan Bilgrami, 2022

