



The Role of Heritage in Contemporary Pakistani Art

Tuba Najam,

Incharge, Department of Fine Arts, GCWUF

 <p>eISSN: 2789-6331 pISSN: 2789-4169</p>  <p>Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license</p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Abstract</h3> <p>Abstract The fusion of traditional and modern art and craft in contemporary era is a fascinating trend that celebrates the richness of cultural heritage while embracing innovation and creativity. Innovative methods, techniques and materials along with combining the art forms and styles, have pushed the boundaries of traditional art and craft, creating a unique and captivating contemporary aesthetic.</p> <p>Keywords: Art, Design, Craft, Contemporary, Pakistan, Culture</p>
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Research questions:

- How are traditional art and craft, still a part of contemporary art in Pakistan?
- How technology plays its role in the fusion of traditional and cultural styles being practiced in modern art trends in Pakistan?
- How do contemporary Pakistani artists keep with the traditional styles while embracing and adapting innovation?

Contemporary modern art enables the artists to experiment with new materials and techniques. Artists digitalize traditional methods keeping with the culture, along with following the modern trends through blending old and new techniques; celebrating modernization and embracing cultural heritage at the same time.

Culture and heritage is an essential part of a society and it is represented through its art and craft. Pakistan has a rich cultural heritage and its traditional art forms are diverse and

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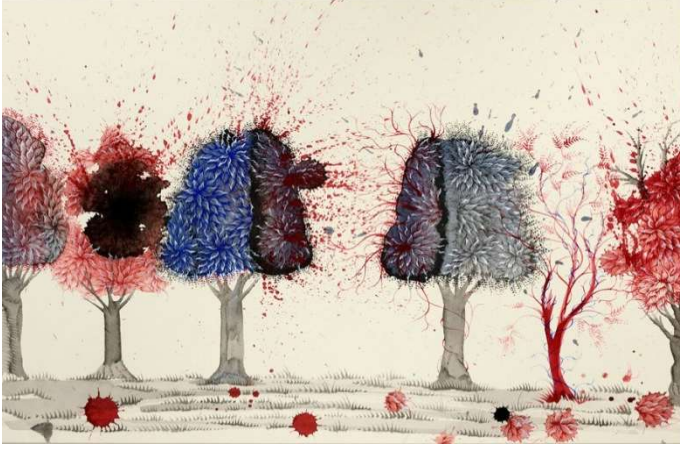
vibrant. Some of the notable traditional art forms of Pakistan include Mughal miniature painting, Islamic calligraphy and Truck art. In contemporary art scene of Pakistan, the revival of Mughal and Islamic art; as well as blend of Folk and modern art; can be observed as a promise with cultural norms and a step towards modernity keeping with the tradition.

Qualitative research is applied to the current research under discussion.

Traditional refers to something that has passed on from generation to generation, rooted in past and having a long historical heritage behind it. It includes the characteristics of a particular region, culture or community. In context with art, craft, music and other creative expressions, traditional typically means that the work is based on established techniques, styles, forms and methods, which reflect cultural heritage and community values of a specific area and people. Pakistan has a rich cultural heritage and its traditional art forms are diverse and vibrant. Some of the notable traditional art forms of Pakistan include Mughal miniature painting, Islamic calligraphy and Truck art. In addition to these art forms, traditional Pakistani crafts comprise of embroidery in different styles including Sindhi, Punjabi, Balochi and Kashmiri embroidery, rally making known for the vibrant color and pattern involved, block printing and ajrak making, wood work including intricately carved decorative items and furniture, pottery, carpet weaving, mosaic and ceramics. These traditional art forms showcase Pakistan's rich cultural diversity and heritage.

Art is a way of expression to present religious, political and social matters, as well as it can be an extension of daily life. The contemporary art practices all around the world and specifically in Pakistan has become a wider spectrum providing the artist with more liberty and space to work as a visual artist. During the twenty-first century, design became an important addition in art all around the world and many Pakistani artists started to use design along with art to create art pieces having characteristics of both art and design in their art works. Different Pakistani artists are pushing the boundaries to create pieces of strong emotional and aesthetic quality collectively. These artists include Imran Qureshi, Ayesha Khalid, Asad Ali Chingezi, Rashid Rana, Ruby Chishti and many others. Many art educators in the art institutes, encourage abandoning of material, medium, techniques and scale, as a result of which, the young generation artists are learning the modern trends to make a difference in current art scene.

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1. Imran Qureshi. Story of Two. Gouache on paper. 2019
Source: <http://www.dreamideamachine.com/?p=47664>



2. Ayesha Khalid. Water had never feared the fire. Fabric, gold plated and gold pins. 2018.

Source: <https://blog.qagoma.qld.gov.au/aisha-khalid-transforms-traditional-miniature-painting-with-pins-apt9/>

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3. Rubi Chishti. My birth will take place a thousand times no matter how you celebrate it. Recycled cloth, thread, straw and yarn. 2014.

Rubi Chishti made use of traditional doll making craft of Indo-Pak Subcontinent for thought provoking journeys of soul and spirit expressed visually to the viewers, which have deep impact on them.ⁱ

Adeela Suleman is another female artist, who is practicing modern trends in art, using domestic household objects in her sculptures. She has created helmets, armours and other protective object out of kitchen tools presenting the concept of barriers and restrictive boundaries for women of our society.ⁱⁱ



4. Adeela Suleman. *Feroza*, 2005. Cooking utensils, spoons, jar, powder coating and enamel paint, inside padded with foam and cloth.

Source: <https://sites.asiasociety.org/hangingfire/adeela-suleman/>

In an age of technology, digital art has become a common ingredient of art works produced by visual artists of the present age. Moreover, the artists who are not using digital images, they make use of design and motifs in a way to compose and balance the composition following the principals of design, instead of following conventional art practices. Many mix media techniques are used in the traditional art forms including miniature and printmaking, providing a broader perspective to both artists and the viewers. Imran Qureshi and Ayesha Khalid are among the prominent miniaturists, who pushed the boundaries and provided a new insight of miniature to the art scene of Pakistan.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the modern era, the art and craft are combined to create art pieces, which are thought provoking, having strong subject and concept to think about it and making the tradition and culture of the area a strong part of the art of that age. The artists working in Pakistan these days, evolve a fast pace with time, making use of variety of materials along with the use of advanced technical aids. The local feel of Pakistani culture and tradition is combined with modern trends and technologies collectively.^{iv}

In visual installations, a powerful way of visual expression in present age, the meaning and form of objects can be changed by simply putting them in different context. Careful placement of ordinary objects brings them into the domain of art.^v Until the early 1990s, primarily modernist artistic practices, focused mostly on easel-based oil or watercolor painting. The styles included semi-abstraction and abstraction, calligraphic modernism, landscapes and deployment of local or historical symbols.

'Henna Hands' is a site specific project, by Nazia Khan by applying henna stencils for creating female figurative images on the street walls of Karachi.^{vi} Though henna is a traditional and

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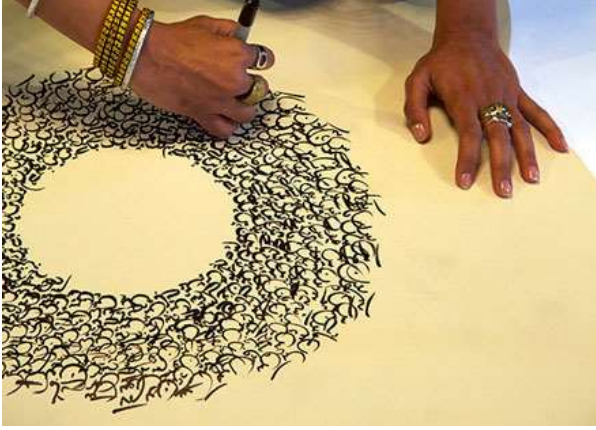
cultural phenomenon but the use of henna in art works in such a way is an entirely contemporary practice in art.



6. Nazia Khan. Henna Hands, 2012.

Source: <https://www.naizakhan.com/work/henna-hands-and-its-afterlives>

Including text with image is also a cultural practice through centuries. In Indo-Pak Subcontinent book illustration in form of miniature painting, was the main style opted and practiced by Mughals. The paintings along with separate text involve poetic and Arabic verses with in the artwork as well. Later on, the text with in the image was practice by Sadequain, including poetic verses in the visual imagery created by the artist. In the contemporary art being practiced in Pakistan, A. S. Rind is using poetic verses as a part of his mix media paintings. But as an advanced approach following the text trend in our tradition and culture of art, Tazeen Qayyum used text misread and unread to present the depth of her philosophical approaches.^{vii} The relationship between image and word are as old as history is, but it takes on new forms in contemporary arts in the art all around the world as well as in Pakistan.



7. Tazeen Qayyum, we do not know who we are, where we go. Drawing. 2015

Source: <https://thekarachicollective.com/loss-and-tension-in-the-exploration-of-text-in-as-image-in-pakistani-art/>

Other artists using unreadable text include Muzammil Ruheel, Aisha Abid and Muhammad Ali Talpur. The connection between image and text has been strengthened in the present age, and instead of becoming a part of border and margins, text has become the main subject of many artworks of contemporary artists.

During the twenty-first century, design became an important addition in art all around the world and many Pakistani artists started to use design along with art to create art pieces having characteristics of both art and design in their art works. The stylized Pakistani art is influenced by previous art trends adopted during 1960s and also followed formerly by the artists along with the new and latest additions done in art during present era. Design elements and different mix media techniques set a new tradition in stylized art in Pakistan. Truck art is an art form present in Pakistani art famous for its vibrant color and unique design, with no two trucks completely alike produced by the artists. This genre of art is adapted by many artists and designers in their own distinct ways. It is among those traditional art forms of Pakistani art, which have a deep impact on both art and culture of Pakistani people. Truck art is a strong source of communication with in and across cultures. These include calligraphy and floral design, with meaningful messages to evoke social messages.^{viii} Truck art has a strong link with pop art in respect to the color but the topics and subject used in truck art is local and cultural. The text involved in truck art, is another example of using text with in art. And these truck art images and text are used by contemporary Pakistani artists for creating art pieces of deep insights involved. The paintings include elements from Pakistani culture, famous sayings and verses from Urdu poetry, painted with vibrant color palette and stylized forms. The Great Wall of Pakistani Truck Art project at Islamabad Airport, supervised by Noor Jehan Bilgarami and produced by renowned arts including Wajid ali and Munawwar Ali Syed and many others. Munawwar Ali, who is a multidisciplinary artist, exclaimed in an interview that the culture of Pakistan is rich and colorful and well represented

through

truck

art.



8. Truck art mural. PNCA. Islamabad

Source: <https://aaminasuleman.medium.com/truck-art-made-in-pakistan-b57fc9ee7099>

Pakistani Trucks are carriers of religious, cultural and political symbols. Truck art is among remarkable cultural arts and crafts of Pakistan, which influences other contemporary art forms of Pakistan.

“Besides enriching and nourishing your inner world, art and culture illuminate your inner life and boost your creativity and imagination.”^{ix}

Many fashion and interior designers are using truck art inspired designs and palette to create pieces that is highly symbolic as well as close to tradition and culture. Visual artists including Anwar Khan, Rashid Rana, Imran Qureshi, amin Gulgee, Shazia Sikandar and Ayesha Quraishi use truck art color and motifs in their own distinct styles in some series of their works, which is a noticeable example of incorporating contemporary art with traditional and cultural perspectives collectively, along with their modern techniques involved.

The contemporary art scene in Pakistan is a vibrant tapestry, woven from the threads of traditional craftsmanship and modern artistic innovation. The amalgamation of these two seemingly contrasting elements has given birth to a unique visual language, one that not only honors the country's rich cultural heritage but also pushes the boundaries of artistic expression.



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Through the fusion of traditional techniques, such as miniature painting, calligraphy, and textile art, with modern materials and concepts, Pakistani artists are creating works that are both globally relevant and locally rooted. Fusion of traditional techniques with modern materials and mediums, digital art, installation art works and performance art, break the limitations of Contemporary Pakistani Art, providing a new perspective and vision to the modern art expression. Experimentation with indigenous materials and sustainable practices provide an additional strength to the artists. This synthesis has resulted in a distinct aesthetic that challenges conventional notions of art and craft, while celebrating the nation's diverse cultural identity.

The contemporary Pakistani art scene is characterized by the revival of traditional crafts with modern twists, experimentation with unconventional materials and mediums, blending of Eastern and Western artistic influences and exploration of social, political, and environmental themes. Emergence of innovative and interdisciplinary art forms is a major characteristic of contemporary Pakistani Art.

This amalgamation has not only revitalized traditional crafts but also provided a platform for artists to engage with contemporary issues, such as identity, globalization, and social justice. As Pakistani art continues to evolve, it will likely remain a dynamic, ever-changing reflection of the country's complex history, diverse culture and resilient spirit. Traditional crafts are being reimagined and reinterpreted in modern contexts in Pakistani art. 1. Increased collaboration between traditional artisans and modern artists, integration of technology and digital media, exploration of new materials and mediums and continued innovation and experimentation. Unique blend of traditional and modern elements attracts international attention, involving regional diversity and cultural richness. Pakistani artists participate in global art exhibitions, biennales, and festivals which feature in prominent art publications, online platforms and media outlets.

There is a need to establish art programs and workshops to promote traditional crafts encourage collaborations between artists and traditional artisans and develop digital platforms to showcase Pakistani art globally. Artist residencies and exchange programs facilitate global dialogue, involving joint international exhibitions and projects promote mutual understanding. This will strengthen Pakistan's presence in Global Art discourse.

ⁱ Hashmi, Salima. 2003. Unveiling the Visible: women artists of Pakistan. P. 151. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel.

ⁱⁱ <https://sites.asiasociety.org/hangingfire/adeela-suleman/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343322655_Figure_the_Popular_and_the_political_in_Pakistan_A

^{iv} https://www.academia.edu/111302090/Reframing_the_Contexts_for_Pakistani_Contemporary_Art

^v <https://sites.asiasociety.org/hangingfire/adeela-suleman/>

^{vi} <https://www.naizakhan.com/work/henna-hands-and-its-afterlives>

Research Journal

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vii <https://thekarachicollective.com/loss-and-tension-in-the-exploration-of-text-in-as-image-in-pakistani-art/>

viii <https://www.artshelp.com/truck-art/>

ix <https://urbantruckart.com/blogs/news/art-culture-on-the-move?srsltid=AfmBOopIHivV-4FttHDRx1D5ZlYowY3O9hHMqorAxm3S9fM3ls6fp2Vx>