

Art Radar

Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond

Lahore Biennale 01: 7 highlights + in conversation

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Art Radar highlights a selection of artworks on show at the inaugural Lahore Biennale.

The first edition of the Lahore Biennale 01 runs until 31 March 2018 in Lahore, Pakistan, and features the work of emerging and established artists from South Asia and beyond.



Shirin Neshat, 'Turbulent', 1998, installation view at Summer Palace, Lahore Biennale 01, 2018.

Photo: Usman Saqib Zuberi. Image courtesy Lahore Biennale.

The inaugural edition of the **Lahore Biennale** presents the works of emerging and established artists from various

South Asian and international locations, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Europe and the United States, among others. LBF, known as the Lahore Biennale Foundation, aims to give artists the opportunity to present their works through facilitating curatorial structure and spaces. The process of experimentation in visual works is of paramount importance, and the preservation of this aspect of the art making process is a core concern of the foundations mission. LBF also strives to encourage critical dialogue through the use of visual arts as a way to speak about social issues.

After eminent artist **Rashid Rana** stepped down from his position as Artistic Director due to "differing views on the vision for the Lahore Biennale", Qudsia Rahim took the post of Director of this year's event. The Lahore Biennale 01 is free to the public throughout the duration of the programme. Visitors can download the **free app** to guide them through the event, with real time information on the artworks on show. The free access is meant to create public interest in the works on view and to share the messages that each of the artists are communicating as widely as possible, involving the wider community. There are over 60 artists participating in the Biennale, and projects being presented are in a variety of formats, including video, installation, sculpture, painting and photography.



Kay Walkowiak, 'Rituals of Resistance', installation view at Alhamra, Lahore Biennale 01, 2018.

Photo: Atif Saeed. Image courtesy Lahore Biennale.

The Academic Forum is an important component of the Biennale structure. This diverse programme includes talks from art practitioners from international locations and Lahore. The concept is to present diverse perspectives on art and society. This years Forum is organised by author and artist Iftikhar Dadi. Dadi earned his PhD at Cornell University, where he is now an Associate Professor in the Department of History of Art, and additionally is Co-director at Cornell University's Institute for Comparative Modernities.

The Lahore Biennale is set to run every two years. On the Biennale, the organisers state:

Underlying this work will be experimentation, research, conversation and publication related to the arts; collaborative outreach and learning opportunities; and cultural exchange, including facilitating artist residencies.

Art Radar has a closer look at some of the artists and the works on view.



Bani Abidi, 'Memorial to Lost Words', 2016, eight channel sound piece. Installation view at the Lahore Museum, Lahore Biennale 01, 2018. Photography: Atif Saeed.

1. Bani Abidi – *Memorial to Lost Words*

Bani Abidi's work is a sound piece that includes audio recordings of voices retelling accounts of the World War I. The stories that they tell are descriptive and devastating, and encourage reflection on historical pasts. This work has been commissioned at other festivals across the world, including the Edinburgh Arts Festival which was located at the Old Royal High School (2017).

2. Imran Qureshi

Contemporary miniature artist **Imran Qureshi** was commissioned to release a series of paintings, installed at the Shahi Hammam (2018) for the biennale. The works explore a variety of painting techniques. In one of the paintings (pictured above), the large canvas holds the violent marks of an explosion. However, this image has the dual function of also promising a re-birth in a cosmic sense. There is a blue sphere located at the centre of the composition, and the chaos of the marks that surround it are a combination of red and blue moving in all directions. This work could be a metaphor for the position of individuals in shifting landscapes, and the impact of these shifts on society. For the Lahore Biennale, Qureshi also teamed up with the Aga Khan Museum to recreate a **miniature painters' workshop** at the Lahore Fort.



[Click here to watch an excerpt from Alia Syed's 'Priya' on Vimeo](#)

3. Alia Syed – *Priya*

Alia Syed's *Priya* (2008-2011) is a video showing an aerial view of a figure spinning in circles. As the figure goes round and round, the pacing changes from faster to slower, then the speed is resumed again. The viewing of the video causes a sense of disorientation. In some parts, the granular quality of the work abstracts the figure and the clothing to make it appear more organic in form. At some point, the image momentarily shifts to a possible garden or a landscape, a shift that is more prominent at the end of the video.



Iftikhar Dadi & Elizabeth Dadi, 'Roz o shab', 2018, neon, mixed media. Site-specific installation at Summer Palace, Lahore Fort, Lahore Biennale 01, 2018. Photography: Iftikhar Dadi.

4. Iftikhar Dadi and Elizabeth Dadi

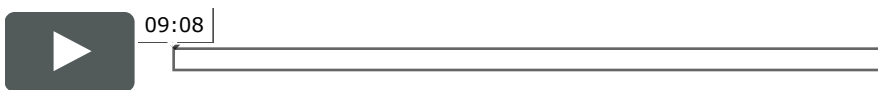
Iftikhar Dadi and Elizabeth Dadi's collaborative work can be seen at Lahore Biennale's 01 Summer Palace location. These artists have worked together for over 20 years on topics that include memory, identity and creative resilience, among others. Some of their light works are sculptural, realised from a series of neon tubes. For example, the works in the "**Efflorescence**" series are based on flowers that serve as symbols of nationalism, even though they grow over a wide geographic range. Efflorescence denotes radiance, the blooming of a flower and the flowering of civilisation, but also has negative values such as discoloration. The utilisation of the neon material in this scale and medium is in direct conversation with commercial signage.

For the Lahore Biennale, the collaborative duo created a large-scale neon installation in the Summer Palace in the Lahore Fort, which was built during the seventeenth century as a retreat from summer heat for the Mughal royalty. Built deep under the Fort platform, the cavernous space has dark interiors, mysterious channels for water circulation and hidden passageways. The maze-like entangled structure of the neon artwork recalls flowing rivers, labyrinths and children's puzzles, illuminating the large hall. The effect is a surreal landscape filled with red and blue hues for the audience to navigate.



Turbulent by Shirin Neshat

from [Video Art Resource](#)



[Click here to watch Shirin Neshat's 'Turbulent' on Vimeo](#)

5. Shirin Neshat — *Turbulent*

Shirin Neshat's *Turbulent* was produced in 1998, and is now installed at the Lahore Biennale's Summer Palace. The work, in two channels, presents two side by side video images. The left side shows a theatre filled with audience members who are all male, while the right side shows a theatre with empty seats. A few moments in and the screen on the left has a male come onto the stage greeted with the applause of the all-male audience. A female figure appears on the right screen's stage, in front of the empty seating and receives no applause. The male character on the left stage begins to sing, while the female figure on the right screen stands in silence. About halfway through the work, the men on the left frame go silent, as the woman from the right screen begins to sing, and the camera pans around her to show her face. The work ends in silence from both screens. A poignant commentary on the situation of women in her native Iran, the work subtly addresses issues of gender discrimination, identity and social alienation.

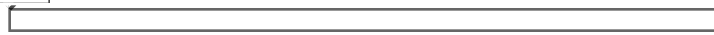


The Observatory

from **Naiza Khan**



06:22



[Click here to watch Naiza Khan's 'The Observatory' on Vimeo](#)

6. Naiza Khan — *The Observatory*

Karachi-based artist **Naiza Khan**'s video work *The Observatory* (2012) is narrated by Nimra Bucha, and edited by Ali Raza. The footage depicts the ruins of a building that was once an observatory. This subject matter is of particular importance to Khan. There are similarities in *The Observatory* that can be seen in Khan's previous video work *Disruptions in the Landscape*. This work describes the impact of globalisation of people in vulnerable territories. In turn, what is also addressed is the relationship between that specific place and the people who live there, and the idea that times of conflict affect perceptions and relationships. Her piece is an interrogative inquiry into the social realm and raises questions about the potentials and limits of artistic agency.



Imran Qureshi's ommisioned work for Lahore Biennale 01, 2018, on view at the Shahi Hammam. Photo: Atif Saeed. Image courtesy Lahore Biennale.

Art Radar had the opportunity to briefly speak with Lahore Biennale Director Qudsia Rahim.

In your own words, what is the central theme of the curatorial vision behind this year's Lahore Biennale 01? As the Executive Director with an arts background, and facilitation of artists exchanges, how does this inform the way you are selecting content for the biennale?

Our vision for the biennale is a decentered one – meaning that instead of curatorial authority being divested solely in one person, we have chosen to work through collaboration. For this reason, the biennale has engaged multiple curatorial voices, and has a dedicated academic advisor. We have developed a program in which the city of Lahore emerges as a point of complex focus, and as a node of exchange between the region, and the rest of the world. Keeping in line with the very active public arts mandate of the Lahore Biennale Foundation (since 2015), segments and projects within LB01 have been developed with the city's various organizations, institutions, and individuals, harnessing various public resources and being shaped by them. The selection of artists and projects have a regional focus – so we picked projects that have relevance to a South Asian public and context, also keeping in mind Lahore's specific circumstances."

What do you see as the function of arts today? What are the objectives and manifestations that compel you the most?

I think in a context such as Pakistan, where we do experience certain kinds of difficulties in terms of access, education, and often various types of socio-political pressures, both internal and external, I think the arts allow us to create resilience – especially in the long run and this is especially why the arts are important for us here. This idea is also reflected in the history of our organization, as below:

The idea for the Lahore Biennale Foundation was borne out of a collaboration between a pharmaceutical company and the National College of Arts in 2013. Eventual LBF co-founders (Qudsia Rahim, then faculty member at the National College of Arts and Osman Waheed, President of the company) initiated Art for Humanity, a collaboration between the two institutions that involved taking students from the National College of Arts (Lahore) across all disciplines to make art interventions into a public sector hospital. This collaboration had a positive social impact, and the idea that art, besides its undeniable aesthetic value, also has importance for social change, led to the creation of the Lahore Biennale Foundation in mid-2014.

Chelsea Coon

The Lahore Biennale 01 is on view from 18 to 31 March 2018 at various venues across Lahore, Pakistan.

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