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"Threads of Belief"

Erum S. Javed
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“THREADS OF BELIEF”

A Thesis

by

ERUM S. JAVED

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2012

Major Subject: 3D Metals and Jewelry

“THREADS OF BELIEF”

A Thesis
by
ERUM S. JAVED

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May 2012

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ABSTRACT

Javed, Erum, S. Threads of Belief. Master of Fine Arts (MFA), May 2012, 71 pp., 26 images, 14 references.

As the needle pierces the fabric, the thread finds its way. As the needle lays its rhythmic path, the thread follows the needle, creating a specific sound and pattern. The needle and the thread together create something new or mend something old. As an artist I have found my direction, and sensitivity, the same as the thread that finds its way by filling and tying the spaces between other threads in the fabric.

As I draw the point through every stitch, I am drawing a thought, a moment, an expression from past and present. I seek a thread, a theme, and a truth that allows me to give freedom to my thoughts while binding those thoughts to something tangible and unique. I weave threads to lay a path that will reveal a future.

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CHAPTER I

The strong foundation of an ancient society found in an area north of India and east of Afghanistan, seventeen thousand miles from my home in the U.S.A, is based upon rocks, lines, strings, and dress. Although I am no longer a permanent resident of my place of birth, in Pakistan, its culture is like my shadow, sometimes discreet other times obvious but always with me. For the past few years I have engaged in the dangerous occupation of art. I find myself testing the traditions of acceptable paths to wisdom as I use crafts to explore my personal understanding of the nature of being. Contemplating my progression as an artist, it is evident that unlike the sciences, true artistic growth is believed to be anecdotal. When reflecting upon my work I try to avoid these trappings of semantics and the thinness of irony.

At the root of my aesthetic discourse lies an earnest concern with regard to new traditions and the novelty of the past. To many, including myself, there is an illogical reasoning to examine things that just cannot be.

Common sense dictates that by nature, traditions are new and history is not a novel idea. However, distilling traditions and history to simply a set of facts excludes the culmination of the life experiences of our ancestors. My desire for the seemingly impossible new tradition is rooted simultaneously by my proclivity for more change as well as steadfast optimism that modern ideas have great potential for human expression. This is not to say that familiar conventions should not be embraced. My work embodies the acceptable styles of expression in the form of

drawings, the use of rocks and strings, fine metals, clothing, poetry as well as modern applications of such technologies as 3-D modeling.

As artists, our approach to our work is paramount to its unfolding as it defines both the work's conceptual basis as well as its aesthetic nature. The poet institute in a poem an inspiration or impulse that instigates a delight, a fire, bliss, and a joy that is strong and brief but highly delicate. Poets need a pertinent expression for their imaginations; their passions drive the main impulse of poetry.

The artist and the poet find their voices in the fleeting dew, which quickly evaporates as the light of meaning peeks above the unconscious landscape. As Frost claims, "Every piece of art starts as an emotion; who it has found its thought and the thought has found its form."¹ What starts out as a *desire* to record something that has been imagined, rivets itself to the artist's deep-rooted state wherein abstract emotions dominate in order to achieve blending of both form and meaning. The realization of the sum of form and meaning is the sole purpose of my work. I strive to express a poetic aesthetic through actual form; in this sense my work is as poetic as it is artistic.

Every night when all asleep, my mind fills with wondrous questions. What is the function of art? Is it the same as, mankind? Can we master ambiguity in art? Does every line and every brush stroke in a drawing or painting already history before it finishes finally? They seep through the still thick air like spilled coffee on a tablecloth, producing marks that come from deep within my subconscious. Rather than rushing to clean up the impending rush of waves, my mind traces the drawings as they leap on my abaya, capturing them before they dispense into wakefulness.

¹ Edward Connery Lathem. *The poetry of Robert frost: The Collected Poems. Completed and Unbridged by Robert frost.* (New York: Hery Holt and Company Inc, 1979), 134.

The Burqa or Abaya has its origin with desert nomadic life long before Islam arrived. It is a traditional attire publicly worn by Muslim women since the 5th century. In some Muslim societies like Saudi Arabia, wearing the Abaya is mandatory, in others, such as Pakistan, females have a right to choose attire for themselves. The garment is used to protect the women from the harsh desert weather conditions. It can be a symbol of one's respectability towards women, as it is an enveloping garment. Muslim women wear it to follow the Islamic traditions of cloaking the entire body. It is typically worn over the usual daily clothing when a woman leaves her home and is removed when she returns to the sanctuary of the household. The tradition is quite old. As explained by Islamic law, women must wear modest clothing and garments should not attract attention and should not be used as a symbol of wealth or social status. Changes in lifestyles and fashion have transformed the burqa. In the 1960's a new and more functional burqa emerged in Pakistan. The tent like sky blue burqa, currently worn in Afghanistan, gave way to a two piece black satiny coverall, a full-length overcoat for the torso and head piece usually called a Hijab(scarf). This new fashion grew from a new generation of Muslim women growing up in cities. It was more functional for the women who chose work outside their homes. Covering a women's form, the abaya protects her from the gazes of those who would seek to objectify her. It is a common misconception that this piece of apparel is a symbol of male dominance imposed upon women by Islamic law. In truth, it is a symbol of female liberation as she controls how men view her physically. The invasive gaze and scopophilic stare is reflected back upon the aggressor who has no choice but to either behave or live a life of quite dissatisfaction.

Contemporary urban legends are the modern equivalent to ancient folk tales. Their credibility is based upon the fact that young and old alike know the story, not on actual fact. Understanding urban legends and the reasons for their persistence informs us of the unspoken beliefs and biases

of any given culture. With the evolution of technology and social media, storytelling in the form of the ‘urban legend’ has found its way to social networking platforms and news outlets. In this modern arena, the line between fact and fiction blurs and further moves Western sensibility away from liberal ideas and towards fear of foreign people from unknown lands. Today, many cultures have incorporated the myths and legends of other people into their social fabric. It is imperative to remember these stories are just that and should not be taken as truth.

The rumor spread across Pakistan in a blitz of text messages on cell phones.

There was killer virus on the loose and all you had to do to catch it was answer a call from an infected number. The virus did not hurt cell phones, but would-- eyewitnesses confirmed this—cause users to drop dead. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority was forced to issue a denial telling users that it was safe to turn their phones back on.

Then there were messages claiming that Israeli trucks were carrying a million HIV-infected melons to Arab consumers in a new biological warfare plot. This was not to be confused with other urban legends about a “Western-Zionist conspiracy” to use polio vaccines and other medical means to sterilize the next generation of Muslims. “The contemporary Muslim fascination for conspiracy theories often limits the capacity for rational discussion of international affairs,” argued Hussain Haqqani of Boston University,

at a conference in Istanbul entitled “Fact vs. Rumor: Journalism in the 21st Century.” This recent gathering of journalists and scholars was organized at the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life.²

Living in America as a female Muslim artist, who spent her youth in Pakistan and now resides in United States is problematic in a number of ways. At many times my work is questioned with reference to the social and political conditions of my homeland.

In the wake of Post-Modernism many artists have gravitated towards the security of making work based upon identity politics. This approach provides many artists with a secure and defensible conceptual position upon which they can play out their aesthetic inclination. This conceptual position is steeped in the “us against them” dialogue providing an instant group of supporters. In this we find patrons attracted to a particular artist not because of the artist’s attention to aesthetics, but due to the overriding political message. This approach to art relies too heavily upon cultural myopic references to satisfy my aesthetic and personal process. However, many who view my work may not understand that I am not commenting on identity politics despite the text and forms I choose to incorporate and due to the mega-narratives that are unfamiliar to them.

Sorting out the true culturally relevant stories from the urban legends can be a difficult task for anyone, but to discern truth from fiction for those who live in different and distrustful cultures is exhausting. It can be much easier for people to maintain an accepted myth than recognize a new truth that challenges a long held way of thinking. People are attached to their cultural myths and fears, as they are part of a society’s traditions. In myths there are patterns,

² Terry Mattingly, “Islamic Urban Legends,” *OrthodoxyToday*, last modified July 31, 2007, <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles7/MattinglyUrbanLegends.php>.

patterns of good and evil, patterns of reward and punishments, and patterns of dark depths and bright horizons. Myths and legends govern understanding of good and bad, action and reaction, them and us. Artists, poets, writers, and storytellers should pass on truth instead of urban legends and myths. Myths change, they do not remain as it is they are mysterious but untrue.

In New York in 2007, one of my old friends asked me if I like living in Texas? I told her, Texas is ok but I miss New York everyday. I have found some good friends but still it is not quite what I want. She then said, “If it is not what you wanted then you have to make it what you always wanted, make it happen”. Sometimes in life, there is someone or something informs you about yourself. This is what happened right then at that moment. When I came back to McAllen, I knew that it was time. I realized that I wanted to be a professional artist. That short conversation opened up a whole new world for me. That is how I began this journey and found the limitlessness of experimentation and art. My art gave me a great deal of courage to express my personal experiences and imagination. Through art I discovered the undiscovered.

CHAPTER II

How do we come to our beliefs? Why one belief and not another? How many of our beliefs do we have due to independent thinking and how many have been passed on from our culture, parents and friends? Ideally, during upbringing and formal education we should develop the ability to evaluate our beliefs objectively and fairly. But if everyone around us has the same beliefs and mindsets, how do we know if our own thinking is sound?

According to The National Council For Excellence, the definition of critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.³

Critical thinking helps to develop, form and shape one's thinking. It is different than other thinking skills because it requires thinking with awareness. Critical thinking is self guided and self disciplined, therefore leading to extensive development of socially aware contemplative thought and personal growth. This further allows you to nurture yourself from the inside out, creating an awareness of what you love, what you like, and where you are about to flourish. This growth becomes evident as control of

³ Scriven , Micheal . Richard Paul ,Critical Thinking as Defined by the National Council of Excellence, summer 1987, <http://www.critical thinking.org/pages/defining-critical thinking/766>. 2011 foundation of critical thinking

thought is shifted from emotions to thoughtful insight. Critical thinking leads us to form more knowledgeable opinions and make better decisions.

At the beginning of my journey as an artist the simple act of creating art suggested the need for personal discovery and investigation. I began to uncover the moments that touched my heart profoundly and was able to discover reality and truth about others and myself. This exploration led me in the direction of understanding the importance of art in my life. I firmly believe that once we are able to understand ourselves it becomes easier to understand others.

Once we are aware of who we are, what we want and what are we capable of, we are led to determine our personal and individual values, goals and rules guiding our actions and thoughts. The journey to personal growth makes us aware that no matter how much we know, there is always more knowledge and information to be discovered.

According to Aristotle:

“All men by nature desire knowledge,”⁴

Personal growth is regarding the desire, pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge of ourselves, the workings of society, and the ability to think help to develop the skills to make hard choices that shape the kind of world we want to live in.

How do we find truth about ourselves, truth about others, truth about our faith, truth about our past? If all of this were simply known without any effort, we would miss the curiosity and mystery that leads to the beauty of finding truth.

Creativity is about finding the truth whether it be mine, or another's. I reveal these truths through my art.

The Abaya No. 3, image no. 1, reflects my vision and represents the truth about my

⁴ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1966). All translations of and references to Aristotle are from here unless otherwise noted.

values. It combines imagination and insight; I chose the color green to dye fabric because green is the symbol of purity in my culture. Like all of my Abayas, *Abaya No.3* is of sheer silk chiffon, because I enjoy the fine quality of the fabric. Before writing the prayers on it, I put that Abaya on and I felt how it enveloped me. It felt warm and pure. Sometimes, simple actions or experiences become the basis of self-discovery, this is what happened in that moment. I discovered a truth about myself. When I am not intimidated by my fears, I create fearlessly, and the creation becomes genuine and strong. I dyed the fabric green using the ombre technique in which the color of a dyed cloth is graduated from light to dark. The use of the ombre technique here represents many shades of truth, which is always there in different colors, needing to be discovered. My fascination with textures, patterns and designs led me to write prayers on one of the panels of the Abaya. I wrote the prayer in the Urdu language, my native tongue. The letters of the Urdu language are very beautifully structured, and when they are put together they always make stunning designs. This is why we have so many calligraphic artists in Pakistan and in the Arab world. I wrote a daily prayer, which represents the purity of thought. Daily prayers are very important in my life. To whom and how to pray is taught to children from a very early age. Our daily prayers become truth in our lives. In a way we seek our prayers as we seek truths. This work is a synthesis, a rhythmic exploration of imagination, shaping the design, color and essence of what we are becoming.



Image 1

Abaya no. 3, 2010
Pure Silk Chiffon Dyed
60 x 55 in

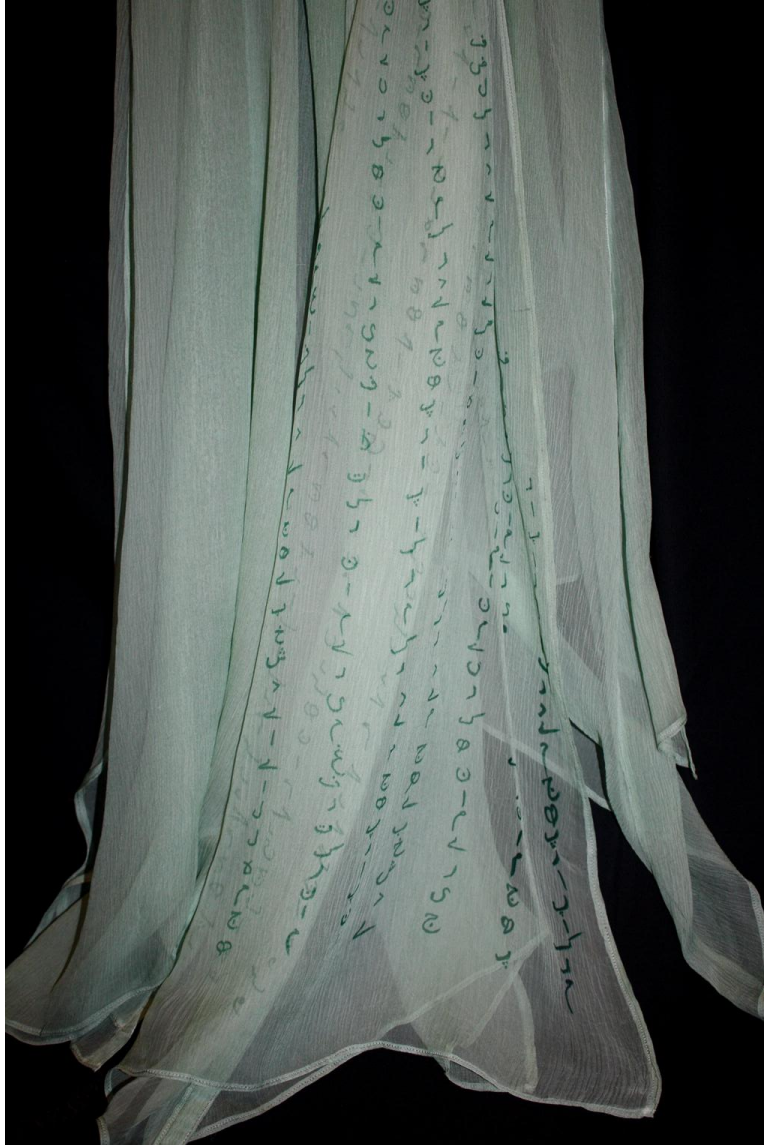


Image 2

Abaya no. 3 (Detail)

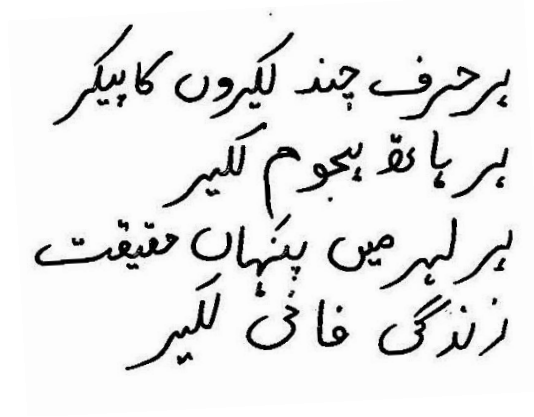
I often wonder, what do lines tell me? I see lines everywhere and in everything. To my eyes, everything seems to be made up of lines. But in reality, physically, lines are nowhere.

For me, lines are not only lines. They are a scale, a measuring device used to discover the ampliteness, the capacity and the reality of almost every tangible thing. By using lines in this way I get the idea of the relationship of objects to ideas, of people to culture, delineating my own capacity of understanding all things. I create lines on paper with ink in order to create things of beauty that then become art. I weave lines using a crochet hook, turning them into body adornments.

A line is very flexible; it bends to my language and perhaps to me as well. Line is for everyone and found everywhere. Anyone can see it, listen to it, draw it, and weave it. Line progresses. Understanding the unlimited capacity of a line's progression drives me further along my journey, moving me from one chapter of life to the next. In line I find it possible to allow myself to shift from the girl I was to the woman I am still becoming.

Every line suggests a certain sense of meaning and a strong expression that constructs and conveys an idea. My lines guide me, lead me and bring my imaginings into reality. Line can be anything; abstract, figurative, a geometric shape or simply a mark. Marking the beginning of a new unknown is always complete within itself.

Line is a difficult concept to understand, line is basic to all arts. My lines are formed and drawn purposefully and naturally. I love to draw lines that represent something that is not there. They are my tools for communication. I use lines to define an image and to express ideas, they always tell a beautiful and unique story.



Every letter is a complete picture of lines

Every hand holds a crowd of lines

lines are the reality of all waves.

Life itself is mortal limit

My first introduction to art was through promotional New Year calendars that my dad used to bring home from different pharmaceutical companies with which he did business. Every year, I found a new one with either Indian, Pakistani, or Mughal art photographs or paintings. The very first in my memory consisted of the paintings of Abdur Rehman Chughtai, who was a descendant of the chief architect of Shah Jehan who was the emperor of the Mughal Empire in the Indian Subcontinent from 1628 until 1658. The calendar pictured twelve of Chughtai's paintings, one for each month. For hours I looked at the lines, colors and his imaginative skills.

Chughtai aspired to revive the traditional Indian art, which is comprised of both Mughal and Persian influence in his paintings. His virtuosity in the use of line recalls the accomplishments of Persian artists. His lines are employed to create movement, which inspired me right from the moment I began to develop an appreciation of art. Later, I learned much more about his work and concepts. He was in search of cultural

identity as the establishment of the British Colonial rule created peculiar problems for the people and artists of the Sub-continent. The Colonial power, in order to impose itself, needed to convince the natives of their inferiority. The Colonists tried to disseminate the idea that if the natives are to become civilized they should speak the language, wear the clothes, eat the food, and acquire the manners of the invading colonists. Natives were encouraged to reject their history, culture and traditions in favor of English traditions.

Chughtai's claim on Indo-Pakistan's painting lies in helping raise national consciousness and in establishing a level of aesthetic excellence. I am drawn to the simplicity of form and color in the works of A.R. Chughtai. There is a tender sensitivity and calm in his figurative drawings and paintings that makes them a joy to behold.

In Laila, image no.2, and *Omar Khayyam*, image no.3, Chughtai demonstrates how an artist can utilize line to create movement. Chughtai's feminine figures, almond shaped eyes, long flowing dresses and prominent outlines have become his trademark in Pakistan and India.

'The important element of Chughtais work is achieving a perfect harmony of line and expression. The delicate lines of Chughtais pictures are by no means insipid and shaky but firm and precise with a marvelous neatness and a most exactness of material. In Chughtais works there is a decorative element yet it is purely rational. The line work, the design element and the transparent layer of colors produce a pleasing atmospheric quality in their pictorial lyricism'.⁵

⁵ http://goartgallery.com/chughtai_a_r.htm



Image 3

Abdur Rehman Chughtai
Laila, 1936
Oil on Canvas



Image 4

Abdur rahman Chughtai
Omar Khayyam, 1940
Oil on canvas

Inspired by Chughtai's lines, in *Sequence* (fine silver crochet necklace) image no. 4 and image no.5, I am able to tie many concepts together. Straight lines, curved lines and narrative lines link concepts with thoughts and individuals with environments. I explored the beauty and the whimsy of fine silver delicately drawn wire (30 gauge) in my hands while crocheting. Although I never learned the way my mom used to roll the yarn on her left index finger, I learned that every hook and thread connects and moves uniquely with the artist. Once that connection happens, the opportunity of unlimited creativity emerges. The crispness of metal wire contrasted with the softness of yarn represent a connectedness; symbolizing the variation in thread of life. I feel that my crochet designs have a balance of intricacy and strength. They have refined strong lines but with a feminine touch. There is also a balance of sculpture that creates an innovative yet sophisticated piece of jewelry. I use one single continuous line of silver to create innovative and elegant pieces of art.

Another artist from Pakistan who inspires me in various ways is Gulgee.

Considered the finest artist in Pakistan, Gulgee's paintings exhibit freedom of action and generosity of spirit, which he portrays in an exuberance of free and open expression. Dr.

Annemarie Schimmel, an internationally acclaimed scholar, is one of the leading experts on Islamic literature and mysticism in the world. She wrote of Gulgee:

Gulgee's work in the various style of classical calligraphy is amazing. One of the most unique aspect of his work is the concept of 'nuqta': a dot, a circle floating somewhere in the golden and silvery air – it might be the sun, it might be the moon, symbol of the beloved's beauty but the



Image 5

Sequence 2011
Fine silver 30-gauge crochet
3.5 x 15 in



Image 6
Sequence (Detail)

spectator who is familiar with the mystical symbolism will sense that this might be an allusion to a representation of the ‘Primordial Dot’, the first thing that according to some mystics’ thought, appeared on the empty tablet of creation out of the Absolute Unity of God. Gulgee is the calligrapher who is capable of writing in the most perfect classical style, and he is the artist who knows how to see and make others see, the mystery of the eternal nuqta, the Primordial Dot out of which everything once appeared to show itself in the shapes of man and animal, or mineral and plant. Thus he reminds me of Maulana Rumi’s famous line of the ascending ladder of creation, which the great Persian mystic poet wrote in his ‘Mathnavi’:

“I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as plant and became something in the animal kingdom...”⁶

Gulgee’s *nuqta* a dot, grows into my line, the root of my art. A line is not only the beginning of every creation, but also the end. It may be the last stitch, the last brush stroke or may be the last crease. Line may be obvious or implied, crisp or subtle. It leads, it defines and is present in each and every real or imagined form. It exists in all letters, numbers, and shapes, defining all expressions. Gulgee’s work portrays his energy and strength. Similar to emotional poetry, his paintings are composed by rhythmic gestures and the forceful laying of thick oil paint, which brings to mind quiet conversations. *The Wave*, image no. 6, oil on canvas, inspires me in its movement, use of color and radiating

⁶ Annemarie Schimmel. *Gulgee*. (Karachi: Ferozesons), 2007.



Image 7

Ismail Gulgee
The Wave, 2000
Oil on Canvas
43 x 78 in

energy. His hand restlessly paints all the rhythms and energy he feels inside himself. As he said about his own work, “my work is the externalization of my inner journey.

Through it I communicate with the pulse of life.”⁷

I think for artists, art is an act of renunciation. Movements of hand while drawing, movements of fingers while crocheting and the movements of arm while hammering metal take control of thoughts, emptying the mind of all thoughts and feelings. Only through physical movements am I able to commune with my tools to make art. It helps me to capture the movements in color and movement in light, as in *Something New* ink on paper, image no. 7, I strove to bring movement of the situation into the drawing composition. Here I wanted to emphasize the movements of the wheels of the bicycle. They represent movement, self-discovery and a new journey. *Something New*, is one of my earliest drawings. Through *Something New* I found a way to move forward, to explore the unseen and the unexpected, bringing insight and vigor to my work. In this piece the tree leads the viewer’s eye along the path acting as a milestone. The tree portrays part of the journey, not the destination. I kept the background very simple and clean, each purposeful mark of the ink revealing past and present. My pen does not move vigorously, but instead moves in rhythmic progression. There is a flow that paves the path for each new stroke.

⁷ Gulgee, 1.



Image 8

Something New, 2010
Ink on Paper
9 x 12

Something New

Never ridden off the page.

Today I think I will try

what the bindings bring I do not know

but ready or not here I go

I found poetry compliments my art regardless of the medium I use. Subtle beauty, unexpected intricacy and timeless quality inspire me. I create garments and using fine fabrics and old history. The beauty of the piece I create comes from a material's unique history combined with the contemporary design I incorporate. I love the simplicity and the complexity that can be found in lines everywhere. A well-formed and drawn line is a manifestation of beauty in art.

Rumi says,

‘You change one piece of ground to gold.

Another you shape into Adam.

Your work transforms essence and reveals soul.

My work is forgetfulness

and making mistakes’.⁸

Poetry awakens our senses, not only for the aesthetic pleasure but also helps us make connections to others, culture and ourselves through language. Poetry has a central place in our lives. For instance, it is a constant interpretation as to what life is about. Poetry has entered popular songs through the lyrics which are written and

⁸ Coleman Barks. *The Soul of Rumi*. (New York: Harper One, 2002), 152.

sung by popular artists and have become a strong part of culture and society.

Poetry can be revolutionary. It evokes feelings and provokes thoughts about social, political and personal issues. It is more than a vehicle for expression of emotions, it is a way of connecting. Poetry is powerful. The relationship of the strange with the familiar through the imagery created by a well written line is the most beautiful and powerful aspect of poetry. Poetry transforms the way we see the common through a unique perspective. Poetry is something central to the poet's life and experience, something of unique value. Poetry gives us a better understanding of past, and of life.

Poetry uses rhymes and rhythm to help us explore and discover language, emotions and cultures. It is a helpful tool in learning to read. Poetry can also make us laugh and establishes connections to texts. It helps in creating visual imagery, asking questions about ourselves, cultures and our future. It opens the door to discussions about the poet's purpose. Through poetry we grow as critical thinkers. Poetry attempts to speak the truth about the world and about people. The psyches of individuals who seek to interpret truth and reality conceal a hierarchy/order of values which contains the foundation of spirituality and personality which are tapped into poetry.

I find poetry in my own work. I was first introduced to poetry when I was just a child. That first experience was in the Urdu language; I knew that I liked the crispness of poetic lines but its deeper meanings were beyond my understanding. As I grew older, I discovered Rumi. I enjoyed him in English through the translations by Colman Barks however, I yearn to learn Persian so I can know the true Rumi.

One of the most definable characteristics of Rumi's poetry is its thriftiness of language. He is careful in his selection of words in order to stay concise and clear. Although he is sparse in his choice of words, he manages to weave poems heavy with meaning. Rumi considered a word's emotional qualities, its musical value and its relationship to mystical thought. I love the evocative quality of Rumi's work. It typically evokes an intense emotion in the reader, whether it be joy, sorrow, loneliness or love. I connect to his poetry, the revelation, the insight, the understanding of elements of truth and beauty.

Poetry can be stronger than prose, yet is so delicate and fragile in thought. Poetry has yet a moment to be conceived. Like the wind, it is there, then gone. Rumi's poetry is a work of art, a painting, a collage made of idioms and words that are intriguing, self contained and self defined. It's truly an art form, the art of expressing indefinable.

While you are still yourself,
you are blind to both worlds.
That ego-drunkenness will not
let you see. Only when you are
cleansed of both, will you cut
the deep roots of fear and anger.⁹

Discovered through his mystic poems, Rumi expresses a distinct uniqueness. Through poetry he takes us to another world. Sometimes he leads us just to the entrance and other times deep into the world of love, Sufism and mystics.

⁹ Barks, 93.

In my first crocheted metal work *Crochet Ring 1*, image no. 8, I see a line of poetry, praising consistency and exploration. My very first memories of my mother are of her crocheting; I still remember her hands, holding the crochet hook in her right hand and making patterns of yarn one after another. There began the slow dance of her hands, hook and yarn, which created so many different pieces. I always enjoyed that rhythm and movement of her hands and thought someday I would do the same when I became older, as I related crocheting with age, not with learning. Last year as I began to learn the craft, I found that I found the craft of crocheting does not come with age but with only with learning and practice.

I was so desperate to learn how to crochet but my mom, bed-ridden, could not teach me. I asked my sisters, but they did not know either. All of my friends told me that their mothers and grandmothers used to crochet but they had never learned. Finally, I asked Viviana, my friend and a fellow graduate student, and she told me that she had learned to crochet a long time ago. The same day, with yarn and hooks, I excitedly visited her at her home. Soon she realized that she only remembered how to make a chain, the very first step for each and every crochet project. I was happy because I had learned the first step in a moment.

My ideas are conceived and take shape both as conceptual process and as a design process. I weave my ideas, drawings, and concepts into crochet pieces. My drawings are not the end products but are rather a process of discovery. My end product as an artist is the successful closure of a line of imagery into how I might best



Image 9

Crochet Ring 2010
Silver coated wire crochet
2.3 x 1 in

express an idea or a philosophy. My drawings serve as the best medium to represent the concepts and feelings which are hard to succinctly express in words.

By making chains of yarn and silver wire, I began to comprehend not only pattern, but also how creativity is the art of making form from chaos. Loop after loop interconnects and then progresses into a chain, chain connects to another chain forming a bigger more intricate pattern. Sometimes the line of yarn and silver wire gets tangled or twisted. It was through this process that I realized the art of creating something beautiful and whimsical happens by combining elements in such a way that something new is formed. The experience is similar to giving birth to a new life, I experience bliss when the moment of creative union is completed.

I believe that travelling has unlimited possibilities of inspiration. When I travel I do so with my art bin carefully placed in my carry case. My drawings are heavily influenced by travel. There have been visits to Karachi and Dubai in which ordinary experiences turned extraordinary. During a journey, I spend most of my time drawing. In 2009 while travelling to Pakistan *Just Going*, Ink on paper, image no. 9, began; I started that drawing as soon as the plane left the ground. My plane was going higher and higher, I saw a tree and my pen began to spread ink. In *Just Going*, the images seem fluid and atmospheric which helped me find a more profound way to enter into the poem.



Image 10

Just Going, 2009
Ink on Paper
9 x 12

Just Going

From 12,000 feet above the earth I saw a tree
with the wind always blowing at its back
and my pen began to speak.
Oh tree, grow
nurture these inky seeds
and grow beyond the knoll
and find out for yourself
what the future doth behold.

Poetry is ancient. The earliest most primitive people utilized it. Civilized cultures have enriched and improved it. Poetry reflects the style, preoccupation, shared beliefs, customs and traditions of the people living in the period in which it is created.

In *Going Somewhere*, ink on paper, image no. 10, I wanted to create beauty with movement. Every line I draw has to come from a personal experience. I create, I guide and I position each and every line and stroke where it belongs. *Going Somewhere* is inspired by my move from Karachi to Texas. It was completely my decision to move back to America in 2004. My husband had already settled into his pediatrics practice in Karachi and did not want to move back. However, I thought the move was something that needed to be done. I did not know why, but soon found that it was all about my art and leaving everything behind. This piece is full of hope, ambitions and expectations.



Image 11

Going Somewhere, 2010
Ink on paper
11 x 14

Going Somewhere but Looking One Last Time Behind

Old stones, do not look at me that way
for I have legs and you have none.

Life is full of both big and small journeys. These journeys are the experiences that become the basis of self-realization. Almost everyone enjoys journeys, but we artists enjoy them most when we take a journey within a journey.

In *Adam and Eve*, image no. 11, red string lines and color pencil, I did not attempt to find a subject for my art, but rather attempted to capture the moments when my mind is at rest when colors, threads, patterns, shapes, and words come to life. The piece occurred to me when I saw two trees in the middle of a huge, otherwise empty field while driving to Houston. I just said, in amazement, “Adam and Eve”. I saw only two trees there, but I believe I witnessed something grander. Their strength to survive, grow and branch out joined with the beauty of their isolated unity moved me to not only see the two trees but to feel them. My husband, who was driving, did not like me relating trees to Adam and Eve. I think he must have thought that I should not be relating something so common as trees to the Prophet Adam. My observation and instant reaction felt so natural, but he did not see what I saw. I saw their absolute loneliness and endurance, therefore I named it *Adam and Eve*. This concept was instantly rejected by my husband, which made me adamant to produce a drawing, allowing me to accept the moment and idea and express it through my art.

This drawing is done on two-foot by five-foot rice paper. It was very challenging for me to keep rice paper wrinkle free and to draw on it at the same time. I laid the paper on a



Image 12

Adam and Eve, 2010
The Same Two Trees Series
Thread and Color Pencil on Rice Paper
24 x 60

eight foot long table and finished the whole piece while standing so not to crease or wrinkle the paper. This was also the beginning of the series of five drawings, *Same Two Trees*, image no. 12. All of them are very special and meaningful to me, as they are the branches of the very first two trees, *Adam and Eve*.



Image 13

The Same Two Trees Series
Black Charcoal on Paper
Ink on Paper
11 x 14

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty,'¹⁰

What makes art inspirational? I think it may be the concept and the craft behind every work which gives it a unique nature, beauty, and concrete expression. Concept and craft give a perfect balance to fine art. The beauty and grace of every artistic expression lies in its aesthetic properties. Clive Bell believed that “the starting-point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion”.¹¹

The work of art that possesses form and genuine craft provokes such aesthetic emotion to the viewer. That is how the artist shares his/her experience with the viewer. Post- Impressionism was central to the expression of pure emotions through art. Post- Impressionists intend to capture a sense of order and structure in their work. Bell writes, “ I believe that the principles which underline and inspire post Impressionism movement are more likely to encourage artists to give of their best, and to foster a good tradition.”¹² Once this idea is brought together, the Post-Impressionists pushed the ideas of the movement into new directions. Their work is the pure representation of their emotions and their states of mind. Through the representation of their work, they took their modernist journey from the past into the future. Clive Bell expressed that, “the important thing about a picture, however, is not how it is painted, but whether it provokes, aesthetic emotion.”¹³ Post- Impressionists use simplified colors and structural

¹⁰ Sahih Muslim. *The Book of Faith (Kitab Al- Iman.)* (Guided Ways Technology, 2012), http://www.guidedways.com/book_display-book-1-translator-2-start-160-number-0160.htm, Number.0164.

¹¹ Clive Bell. *Art.*(New York: Perigee Books, 1981), 17.

¹² Bell, 39.

¹³ Bell, 48.

order to develop aesthetic emotions.

In my case, I strive to channel beauty when creating a drawing. I use a simple tool, such as an ink pen or a crochet hook to form a simple line, and work with soft colors. I love the idea of building a product with simple forms to create something unique and beautiful by hand. I combine my drawings and sculptural pieces in order to create something artistic and exquisite.

Bell asks the question, “Why are we so profoundly moved by certain combinations of forms?”¹⁴ He suggests, it is because they express an emotion that the artist has felt. Through the imagery in my work I want to express an emotion, an experience and intellect.

I express my ideas, concepts and thoughts through colors, lines and textures. Behind each of the pieces I create is a story and a source of inspiration and creativity.

¹⁴ Bell, 49.

CHAPTER III

Costume is one of the most visible signs of a civilization. When I started designing the series of Abayas and crocheting silver, Dr. Lorenzo Pace asked me why I am making wearable art. I thought for a moment and said, “What a person wears is often indicative of his or her personality, identity, status, occupation and sometimes even religion”. In my culture clothing is very important; people judge others based on the way they carry themselves and what they wear. The history of present fashion of any society reflects the country’s traditions and culture.

I pay special attention to my clothes. My mother’s insight on proper fashion and style has a great effect on my present day style. She always considered quality and style in Pakistani fashion, and used to say “you eat for yourself and wear for others.” I like to design new styles based on an American wardrobe and Pakistani traditions. I want to incorporate the flavor of western fashion into traditional eastern style and costume.

Sometimes, I see swatches of fabric adorned with patterns and unique texture, colors and designs like a kaleidoscope go through my mind. I draw those images, I look at them for hours to create new designs on fabric or silver. This is the experience that inspired *Yoke Together*, crochet silver coated wire and ABS plastic eggs. Image no. 13, I started by crocheting a metal coated wire swatch then designed ABS plastic eggs in different sizes. After designing the belt I started working on the computer in order to build the



Image 14

Yoke Together, 2011
Silver Coated Wire Crochet
ABS Plastic Eggs

39 x 4

eggs. It took some time to get to the desired shape and size of the eggs and as soon as I was satisfied with the test pieces I printed 45 eggs of four different sizes. I could not wait to get them ready so I could start crocheting them onto the silver wire. I had some considerations regarding the weight of 45 eggs and super fine crochet wire. I had already worked on a couple of patterns and was waiting for the eggs to be ready so I could finalize the pattern. ABS plastic is a strong material. I was intrigued by the challenge to incorporate it with the delicate wire into wearable piece of art. The successful creation of this piece fine-tuned my crocheting and enhanced my artistic skills.

The crochet pattern and eggs danced on my fingertips in an outward movement towards the future, executing what I imagine using colors, design and texture. I am amazed and astonished by the vividness and detail of my imagination, and am inspired to create in my art, the beauty that I see.

I greatly admire the work of jewelry artist Arline M. Fisch, I find the dramatic nature of her artwork extremely intriguing. I am impressed by the larger than usual scale and the contrast of big structural forms with delicate material as silver and gold wire. She uses various techniques and several different materials in her pieces, her textile techniques in metal are modern and innovative. I am drawn to her weaving metal material techniques and found them very fascinating. Her neckpiece *Copper Cascade*, image no. 14 displays her exquisite craftsmanship of crocheted metal.

As commented on her excellence 'Fisch has played a central role in the revitalization of jewelry as a contemporary art form. Her outstanding contribution has been the introduction of weaving techniques into the field of jewelry making. Employing flattened



Image 15

Arline Fiscsh
Copper Cascade, 2000
Coated copper wire, fine silver
Machine knitted and crochet

gold and silver wire, she knits, braids, plaits, and crochets
lightweight, flexible forms with dense, light-reflective patterns,
subtle textures, and glowing color.¹⁵

Fisch's art work shows her vision, exploration, experimentation and investigation. In my work I attempt to do the same: crochet, knit, and braid various threads and metals. *Marquee*. (Silver crochet hat) image no. 15, gave me an opportunity to create a flexible plane of metal which takes the shape of the human head. I am interested in creating pieces that become part of the human form. Crocheting silver allows me to give softness to metal. When people look at my crochet jewelry pieces they are generally amazed that it is fine silver wire not soft yarn or thread. I am keen to incorporate a number of crafts and techniques into my jewelry and dress designs and am drawn to the smoothness and nature of fine precious metals because they exhibit the beauty of entwined designs and patterns remarkably and as is visible in *Marquee*. Image no. 16 (detail) While crocheting, interlocking every loop and chain is very important. If it is not done properly, you will lose the design and form of the piece. This makes crochet pieces interesting, exciting and challenging to create. When I crochet, interlocking every chain fascinates me as one loop is completed and locked then a new loop forms within the existing form. Every loop lays the foundation for the next step, and it happens right there on my fingertips.

¹⁵ Trapp, Kenneth. Risatti, Howard, American Craft in the Renwick Gallery, Washington, D C, 1998. <http://americanart.si.edu/search/artist-bio.cfm.ID5748>



Image 16

Marque, 2010
Fine Silver 30 Gauge Wire Crochet
16 x 16

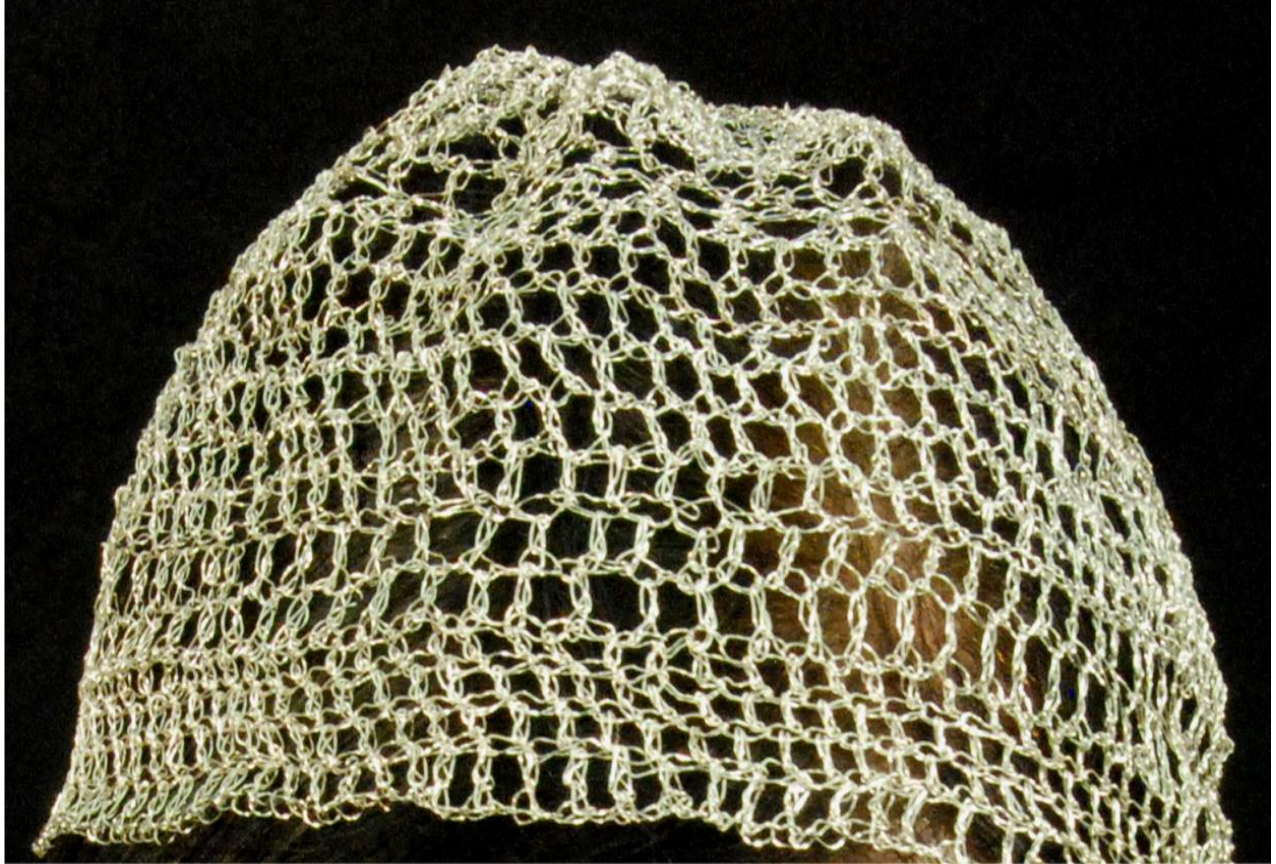


Image 17

Marque, (Detail) 2010

I believe that artistic activity must evolve. It begins from stillness. It grows and reveals beauty itself. I contemplate white blank papers, rolls of undyed chiffons and silks, spools of yarn and silver wire all scattered across my room. I learn new lessons from formlessness and fluidity and realize that they are the sublime of materiality. They are unified as one, and they rely on one another.

My common connection with my audience depends on many variables. One of them is to approach my subject with my whole self, giving my art a sense of authenticity. This is how I constantly give life to my work. Approaching my work this way keeps me grounded and in touch with reality. The one constant goal I have is to be fully present in each creative situation. It is with these ideas of costume, experimentation, traditions and a sense of my whole self that I approached the concept of the Abayas and veils. I have incorporated the silver crochet hat with the Abaya. The quality of chiffon fabric and the delicacy of fine silver wire compliment each other.

Abaya Thumb Print, image no. 17, reveals this concept of the unity of formlessness and fluidity. My mother only wore an Abaya when she went to Mecca, Saudi Arabia to perform our religious rituals Hajj and Umrrah. I myself wore one for the very first time when I went to Mecca, in 1994 to perform Umrrah because there it is mandatory for women to wear an Abaya. When my older sister starting wearing a black Abaya eight years ago, I did not care for the fabric and color. Black is my favorite color, but I do not like it for Abayas.

In 2010, I started designing a series of Abayas. I chose fine fabrics such as chiffon, a light weight woven silk which is airy and sheer fabric for this series, for the particular reason that Abayas are usually made of thick black fabric. I find the traditional



Image 18

Thumbprint, 2010
Pure Silk Chiffon Dyed
60 x 55 in

fabric very stark and bold. I wanted to blend the need and the concept of the Abaya with a feminine touch and soft imagery. I mostly used pure white undyed fabric in multiple layers. The choice of fabric is innovative and practical because of its lightweight nature as compared to heavy thick fabric. In *Abaya Thumbprint*, I took my own thumbprint and printed it on a three-foot by four-foot sheet of paper then traced the print on to the fabric using crushed eggshells along the print lines to act as a resist for the airbrushed dye. The airbrush sprayer blows air with heavy pressure and I was very careful while spraying the dye onto the fabric in order to not blow away the weightless eggshells. Once the fabric and eggshells were completely dried, I carefully removed the crushed eggshells. I used the same technique of using eggshells as resist in *Serenity*, image no. 18, as well. The light grey and light beige colors on white chiffon make the lines of the drawings very subtle. I soon realized that these drawings and thumb print lines on the Abayas did not have to be obvious. While the process is very deliberate, they are simply the outcome of an exuberant personal fancy to be surrounded with beauty.

Last winter my sister needed to go to London for her son's graduation. Her son felt uncomfortable with her wearing a black Abaya in London as it provokes negative connotations in certain areas because of the misconceptions related to Muslim women's attire. She remembered the series of Abaya I designed in light colors and fine chiffon, and had her new Abayas made in light colors to wear in London. They worked very well for her, by fulfilling the purpose of covering her body while the light natural colors blended into the environment. I deeply respect and honor all women, including my sisters who took their stance and chose to wear Abaya and proved that they are free. Their freedom of choice for themselves allowed them to make better choices in their lives.



Image 19

Serenity, 2010
Pure Silk Chiffon Dyed
60 x 55 in

For me, making art is a tool for building bridges between myself and the rest of humanity, reuniting and recording the fragments of thoughts and feelings. This process of creation leads to ideas and the development of thought that I cannot express in any other way. Creating art brings all of these together into a piece. It captures a thought and a moment. As I strive to be deeply reflective and informative of my true experiences and feelings, I create a context while bringing movement to my work.

The concept behind my work/ideas does not express concrete situations. It is an attempt to connect with the unreachable, subtle side of being which is often beyond a verbal vocabulary. When the connection happens, I express it through colors, images and lines. This expression may be described as a careful preservation of a spiritual state. My audience has to be relaxed in terms of not seeking an immediate answer.

My mind is always running with ideas and I am anxious, as I want to act on each of them. Making art releases all the energy that must come out. It helps me work through my thoughts. I even think during sleep. Sometimes, I wake up with an idea and can not wait to act upon it.

When my work takes on many varied forms, it that reflects how much is on my mind, the process flows naturally but not effortlessly. It has allowed me to find opportunities to reflect on that which is too great to carry alone.

I want to be more fearless with my designs. Usually I sketch out and plan the entire piece because sometimes I find it frightening to begin a project and not know where it may ultimately lead. However, I know this experience makes the art worth making. It is a thrill, when I am drawing and crocheting silver wire, I do not sketch out and plan.

Instead, I allow my eyes and hands to make adjustments as I work metal and colors into the composition.

When it comes to my creativity and my ideas, I find lots of inspiration in nature. I love to walk and use these walks to gather a bunch of bits and leaves. I particularly love trees because they record history, are antique, and travel yet never leave their place. They are individual interesting characters. They have stories of their journeys written in their lines and marks. I am strongly attracted to patterns I see in nature, on leaves, the formation of twigs and branches, the pattern of moss striped rocks, pebbles, branches etc. I am interested in taking small patterns and recreating them in my work. I am also greatly drawn to my culture's traditional stitches and embroidery along with modern designs.

My drawing *Ammi Jan (Mother)*, ink on paper, image no. 19, represents all that I have seen and much of what I have felt. While visiting my parents in 2008, I saw my mother becoming part of the whole environment around her without speaking a single word. She lost her speech because of Parkinson's disease and was not able to talk to us, but she was listening to all of us, I knew for sure. Ammi Jan enables me to provide a translation for what an experience or vision has communicated to me. I am completely entwined with both hope and hopelessness.

Ammi Jan (Mother)

When the songbird has lost its voice

When the wind can no longer whistle

After the hummingbird has whizzed by for its last time

I will still hear your voice.



Image 20

Ammi Jan (Mother), 2009
Ink on Paper
9 x 12

The work of Mary Lee Hu thrills me because her inventiveness is constantly intriguing. She investigates with all kinds of woven techniques. Her woven and knotted jewelry pieces are rich and elegant in nature. I truly admire craftsmanship in any culture and lifestyle. I find that aspect of cultural craft in her work. She captures the spirit of a time when craft was entwined with customs. As we do not find this any more, I am drawn to the essence of her work. When I was struggling to learn how to crochet, I realized that even though I came from a very rich culture, somehow I and others like me are losing various magnificent crafts from our culture. I asked my friends from Pakistan about the crafts of knitting and crocheting, all of them told me that their mother or aunt used to crochet or knit, but they never learned how. Sadly, I also never had the chance to learn the art of crocheting from my mother. I believe a culture's traditions and customs are reflected in its crafts. Pakistani culture is based upon many regional and national crafts but in cosmopolitan cities such as Karachi and Lahore the focus of women's upbringing and lifestyle is shifting towards school studies. Everything is mechanically produced and suited for this fast paced era. Crafts are viewed as a waste of time because it takes too much time to create something with hands and from the heart. I believe this is the main reason for the fading value of craftsmanship. I am highly impressed with Hu's ability to incorporate her time, craft and culture within her work so artistically and exquisitely. It's like preserving a moment in physical form.

Using wire as thread, Hu demonstrates her extraordinary craftsmanship by weaving, twisting and knotting metal. The metal wire flows and bends in her hands giving her pieces an expressive quality with rhythmic lines. I adore the linear quality of her artwork.

‘Hu has explored the permutations of basic fiber techniques applied to metal in creating personal adornment. Traditional techniques such as wrapping, coiling, knitting and twining provided a wealth to follow. As an artist first and jeweler second, she satisfied her interest in line and detail along with her fascination with metal. Hu’s work feeds our appreciation of the delicacy of woven forms and our fascination with the subtle movement inherent in textiles.’¹⁶

Hu’s *choker # 88*, image no. 20, is a fine piece of intricate patterns and textural surface. I am inspired by the flowing beauty of the pattern. The undulating twists and curves exhibit the softness, malleability and strength of gold while adding a sense of sophistication and elegance to the piece. In my series of fine silver crochet necklaces, *Necklace no. 1*, image no. 21, I investigated crocheting techniques with wire. Using only my hands to create these pieces took hours to complete just a few inches of crocheted metal. It felt like sketch or ink drawing on paper, each loop and chain is like a sensible and well-thought pen stroke. I found it meditative. I aspire to make my pieces move and flow. Crocheting silver wire enables me to create undulating curves that give a subtle sense of movement and flow to them. The art and craft of crocheting keeps me attached to my culture, my past, and the memories of my mother crocheting. I am no longer part of that culture and society, but relaxing and meditating through such a craft makes me feel connected and closer to my roots. By doing so I have an opportunity to incorporate various hand weaving, braiding, knotting, and knitting techniques into my work which are some of

¹⁶ Alan Revere, “Professional Jewelers Magazine”, *Innovation 8: Mary Lee Hu*, Achieves, June (2000)



Image 21

Mary Lee Hu
Choker # 88, 2005
Twined 18 K and 22 K Gold



Image 22

Necklace no. 1
2011
Fine silver 30-gauge Wire crochet
3 x 16 in

the popular Pakistani regional crafts.

I feel that my cultural heritage and traditions are always present in my work in some form. Somehow, even if subtle, they find their way into my composition. It is these traditions that shape the forms, colors and ideas into a concrete concept.

The importance of gold jewelry in Pakistan is undeniable. In Pakistan people buy gold during special occasions like weddings, festivals and special events. Gold jewelry is considered precious and worthy across all cultures and times. In Pakistan gold jewelry is given to brides as wedding gifts. It is never out of fashion and is something which can be passed down from one generation to the other as ancestral property. Culturally in Pakistan, a woman starts her collection of jewelry as soon as she is married and over a period of time builds a large collection which represents her wealth and personal taste.

I enjoy wearing traditional gold jewelry, and have been inspired by the intricacy and designs of traditional Pakistani jewelry since before I began creating jewelry. As I am drawn towards the color and feel of precious metals, I have a deep fondness for textural jewelry. Over a period of the last couple of years I created a number of jewelry pieces in fine silver. I enjoyed and found myself attracted to the quality and finish of fine silver as compared to gold. I think silver is very elegant and graceful.

In *Intuition 1* and *2*, image no. 22, I worked with fine silver and fabricated an eggshell texture on silver. This eggshell texture and design allowed me to incorporate the concept of fragility and strength with fine silver. I used sand paper and rolled the silver sheet in the mill in order to get the correct texture. Then, I cut the fine silver and gave each piece the shape of a broken eggshell. First, I made a piece with real eggshells in



Image 23

Intuition, 2011
Fine Silver
1 x 12.5 in

order to have visual of the imagined piece and then finished the actual piece in silver. I enjoyed the entire process of creating this piece in silver and am fascinated by soldering two or more metals together by means of a third metal or alloy, which has a relatively low melting point. I found soldering rhythmic, like a choreographed dance where you must get the sequence and timing just right. I find it thrilling to watch the solder joins the pieces of metal by “being absorbed” and jump on to the pieces of metal being heated and then bond them together. I like to create a small treasure to remind myself of the simplicity, beauty and intelligence all around us.

CHAPTER IV

THREADS OF BELIEF

I wanted to exhibit this body of artwork as an installation because I believe that an installation encourages the audience to be fully present in the immediate moment and place, and increasing their awareness of their presence in the environment. It also leads to a reflective experience for the audience.

Threads of Belief brought everything together in terms of my work, ideas, and concepts. It is the expression of my thoughts, my experiences and expectations. Through *Threads of Beliefs*, image no. 23, 24, and 25. I visualize the thread of life running through my work. Before the show, when I was taking studio courses, Dr. Lorenzo Pace always appreciated and supported my work and efforts, and always asked me to continue producing work and “connect the dots.” Long before I started to put up the show I had already decided that I would exhibit my work through an installation. A significant aspect of the installation is building bridges with cultures and people. *Threads of Belief* allowed me to investigate and present the Pakistani culture. I wanted to communicate through my installation. The concept of my work is growth, femininity, and future. I presented this idea using different components of installation. I incorporated a video showing the concept of life, eggshells and future. Each piece displays a hope and a rich future.

There were a number of challenges I faced and decisions I made. While I was



Image 24

Threads of Belief Installation
Abayas on the Clothesline



Image 25

Threads of Belief Installation

designing the Abayas, I hung them on dress forms. However, for the show I did not want to use those forms. I felt they would take away the intended meaning. I considered the delicacy of these pieces when placed in a gallery setting. I rejected the idea of showing them on people as well because it would have taken the shape of a fashion statement. Those pieces are very elegant, delicate and ready to be worn. I created them to illustrate how they are part of the identity of Muslim women. I believe Abaya is a beautiful tradition. I find myself testing the traditions of acceptable Muslim paths to wisdom as I use crafts and costume to explore my personal understanding of the nature of being. I used super fine silk chiffon to create these Abayas as compared to black coarse material used by most of the women of Muslim world. In some settings, the dark bold color of traditional black stands out on its own and becomes very prominent. I designed these pieces to blend in with different cultures while keeping in mind Muslim values and traditions at the same time.

For women who wear Abayas, they become daily clothing. It is not something that belongs to a formal wardrobe; it is a daily use item. Therefore, women usually own a number of Abayas. When I thought about this fact, it occurred to me that it is something very important yet casual and a part of their everyday life. I decided to use a hand-braided clothesline to exhibit the Abayas in order to connect the idea of my fancier versions to the notion of the wearing Abaya casually everyday. I used three different shades, white, ivory and beige because of their significance. White is the color of peace, ivory of life, and beige of hope. I created the clothesline to hang the Abayas to display that how these garments have become part of a woman's daily life. Abayas are there everyday, like laundry, they wash them and wear them because they do not step out of

their homes without wearing one. It is like their second skin. I braided a seventy-five foot long clothesline with one end undone. I hung it from one end of the gallery to the other right through the center of the space and allowed the undone end to spread out all over the floor. That is how it became the symbol of life and hope. Life and hope are just right there, we just need to grab them, just like new discoveries, which are unexpected yet anticipated.

In the installation I wanted to have something, which would help my audience to understand the installation and the background of the art I created. This is what brought about the concept of the video. I shot different aspects of the processes I used to create the pieces. The concept of life, femininity, and growth are the unifying threads and the reason behind the eggshells and the idea of “egg” in my work. I shot video of eggshells, writing on shells, rolling eggs, and crocheting. When I crochet, write on eggshells or make drawings, I always sit in my living room where I can hear the wind chime hanging outside on the patio. I enjoy the sound and feel a connection to it. I do not care to hear music or songs when I work, though I love music. I think I do not need to hear anything else because it is meditative, beautiful and rhythmic. I wrote prayers in a very simple form on a number of pieces of eggshells. When I am crocheting a piece I keep someone in my mind and I always pray for that person the entire time. I recorded the sound of the wind chime and my own voice reciting prayers, and then incorporated both in the video as the soundtrack. I wanted to create while at the same time keeping the naturalness alive. The idea of incorporating the sound of wind chimes and prayers feels very natural to me. They are part of every piece I created for the installation. It’s about inventing there, in the moment. When my audiences watch the video they can access the process behind the

pieces they are viewing in the installation. I think it helps them relate to and enjoy my work. I wanted to provide glimpses of the processes and self-discovery relating to some of the work I created.

How to display the silver necklaces and hats was a unique problem. First I looked for display pieces available in the market, but they did not appeal to me because they were so ready made. I wanted something that could become part of the pieces displayed on it. I bought Plexiglas sheet in order to create something new and exciting to display those pieces. I created some models but was not very impressed by the structure and form as they were not creating a unified form with the silver pieces. As I was already working in porcelain, making eggshell bowls to write prayers on, I had an idea to make a bigger eggshell to display the necklaces. I understood that it would serve the purpose of displaying the jewelry as well as completely becoming part of the piece itself. I liked the delicacy and fragility of porcelain, which reminds me of delicate eggshells. I decided to make a large eggshell, about twelve inches long. After a couple of attempts, I got the exact size and form I imagined. That is how I captured the essence of the concept of my installation, the egg is a symbol of life, hope, and growth. It is simple and beautiful.

I did not glaze those porcelain pieces because I wanted to maintain their simplicity and originality, they look like big actual eggs in their natural color. It turned out to be a perfect blend of my fine silver pieces on white eggshells. Porcelain eggs white and pristine combined with delicate fine silver crochet hats and necklaces connect the entire piece to the concept of femininity, growth, and life.

Threads of Belief is more than the title of my final graduate exhibit. It describes me, my art and the way I approached my work. When I was designing and putting the



Image 26

Threads of Belief (Detail)

show together, I had a lot in mind. I wanted to intrigue my viewers. I believe that art can travel straight into the heart, it has the power to touch the heart. I wanted to display the art in the manner in which it can bring the moment of contact out in front of my viewers. I wanted to lead them into connecting with and enjoying my art.

Threads of Belief is not the ending; it's the beginning of another journey. The words describe my thought process. The word Thread is more than "thread". It is the theme, sense, concept, course, and essence of my beliefs and of the art. The threads run through and connect my ideas, impressions, and views in my work.

The installation helped me understand my feelings and true expressions and connected me to my art. Now I am able to unleash my creative process because it allows me to explore myself and my surroundings. That's how I find my inner voice through my work. *Threads of Belief* defines and describes my approach to life. *Threads of Belief* bind people to their culture and each other. The importance of family, values, and traditions are the common threads that bind generations to their beliefs.

I draw almost every day. When I am crocheting or designing a dress I take a break at some point and draw. It keeps me connected and fluent in the language of lines. I keep a sketchbook with me, and often draw on napkins, loose paper sheets, and fabric remnants. In *Threads of Belief*, I exhibited my drawings around the outside edge of the space, so they can encompass the rest of the work. Walking through the gallery space after all the drawings and works were displayed, I felt that I had borrowed lines from my drawings in order to create the rest of the work. My drawings leap onto the Abayas, hats and jewelry pieces. Perhaps they serve as the connection between my inner voice and my art because I cannot spend a day without drawing. It helps me to think through my life

experiences. The line drawings become a language of thoughts.

Threads of Belief allowed my viewers to see the strong aspect of growth and future through my work. Silver jewelry pieces, drawings and Abayas are the devices used to incorporate the concept of femininity and growth into the installation. Eggs and eggshells are very delicate and precious but they hold the power and strength of the future. Broken eggshells are also indicative of new life. I wanted my viewers to understand the relationship between fragility and strength through my artistic and creative vision. In my work, eggs represent fertility, change, life, and growth. Through the installation, I had the opportunity to witness the reaction of the viewers towards these concepts.

Although my artistic approach allows me to use various media and techniques to deliver my thought, experiences, and message, line plays the integral role in my work. Whether it is ink pen line, a woven line of silver, a thread, or a clothesline, line channels my thought into my art. Like a line, life is constantly moving forward. This movement of life defines growth, which leads to the future. The concept of the future is the essence of my work. I am defining, deciding, devising and revealing my personal vision of growth and future through my art. I feel this sublimation provided me with the ability to capture the graceful aspect of femininity that stands upon the strong pillars of life and the future of all mankind, and then pass it on to the next generation.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erum Javed is a fine artist who has developed into jewelry and costume designer. She was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan. She currently resides in Texas, USA. Her influences are derived from modern western sources that are further refined and re-conceptualized in order to compliment her Muslim Pakistani traditions and beliefs.

“This at times can be challenging,” Erum Javed confesses, “but in the struggle, my aesthetic finds form. Lines are drawn one after another that connect myself to the here and now. In the process, my world, art and traditions become one.”

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