

I am, A Spectacle: Reclaiming Female Consciousness through Performance Art in Pakistan

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Abstract

In the last decade, there has been a resurgence of women artists engaging with performative arts in Pakistan. This paper dissects the multilayered agencies of performative modes of being, deep emotional and spiritual shifts in perception, and the impact of performance art on the consciousness. The dominant explanation of psychological and physical shifts as the body enters into a state of performance. By examining various projects initiated by a Lahore based performance art platform, House Limited, I clarify the processes by which performance works directly inform the gender desegregation in public spaces in Pakistan. Furthermore, the imminent internal and external threats that the women artists overcame as they created these performance-based works. Contrary to what has often been assumed, by actively negating the conventional art market, these artists not only liberated to cement an alternative art community, reputations, and networks, but also actually liberated themselves.

Keywords

Performative modes of being, performative body, body as spectacle, performance art in Pakistan, women artists in Pakistan, women performance artists, performative transcendence, spiritual performing body

Inherently the body exhibits. It creates a spectacle. Spectacle is the primary mode of the body as it shows up in the world. At the same time, spectacle can be deceptive, reductive and rushed, neglecting the complexities of how the body is sensed, represented or experienced.

In a performative mode, the body moves beyond being a mere spectacle and makes way for a more charged and provoked body to dynamically show up in the work. The performative body is not an object to be acted upon, rather a dynamic subject that enables discreet connections with other bodies, objects and the environment.

Amelia Jones writes about the intricacies of the performative experience in *Body Art—Performing the Subject*: “The relation to the self, the relation to the world, the relation to the other: all are constituted through a reversibility of seeing and being seen, perceiving and being perceived, and this entails a reciprocity and contingency for the subjects in the world” (Jones, 1998, p. 41).

What is a performative body? Is there a distinction in the state of being as the body enters into a performance? What happens when you begin to perform?

The human body emerges in twofold; state of conflict and state of vulnerability. The state of conflict surfaces as an inherent void existing within the body i.e., the conflict of feeling inadequate or of inhibiting the expression of one’s truest self. The state of vulnerability is its response, as it emerges when the body realizes the presence of one’s conflicts and endorses their existence within.

These two states exist and surface involuntarily throughout our lives and interactions every day, however the space between experiencing conflict and vulnerability, this nanosecond, this

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eclipse-like space is where one finds, performance. During a performative experience the body pendulums between these two states, oscillating back and forth and charging both the states, destabilizing the body's equilibrium. Once the body locates a path to become one with its conflicts and vulnerabilities, it makes way for the birth of the performative body.

Brian Massumi talks about *cogito and sentio* as two forces that act as '*feeling with the world*' and in turn act as dynamic elements that bring the body to becoming in the world.

“[it] is a *cogito* that is a *sentio*: I feel. Although it is “I” who feel, the existence the feeling verifies is not “mine.” It is immediately the world's. I feel, therefore everything is. Everything that is felt is: that. Differs. Which is why I also am, in this feeling. The world and I exist, in difference, in the encounter. In the feeling. Being is in sensation” (Massumi, 1997).

Performance art is not limited to reducing the body into a spectacle, a product or an art object. The performative body requires an awareness of embodiment. It is a moment of becoming (Massumi, 1997); the moment of cutting through the flesh and creating a unique transpersonal connection with its surroundings which is beyond words and ideas.

Performance art in Pakistan is a recent insurgence of young artists exploring the depths of the performative body. In 2017, House Limited an artist led platform was established in Lahore, Pakistan (Limited, 2018). The primary aim of this platform was to explore performative modes of being, to harness a safe environment for exploring and experiencing this medium, and to initiate projects that instill the body as a primary medium of expression. House Limited started with a pedagogical framework in place, inviting young makers to participate in various workshops on exploring the body as a medium in art. These workshops aimed in creating an environment for the artists outside traditional art spaces and allowed them to permeate into the city; its streets, bazaars and other local occurrences. It allowed the artists to experience and observe the innumerable social performative patterns and experience the everyday moments of human interactions while connecting with the fabric of the city and its residents.

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Figure 1. Nayyab Naveed, *The world will wither with me*. From *House Residency Archives*, *House Archive*, 2018.

The platform focused on inviting young thinkers and creatives from all disciplines and engaging them to unpack their performative sensibilities. Each artist was encouraged to choose sites in the city including streets, parks and shopping areas, and to perform in front of an unrehearsed audience.

House Limited pioneered in organizing workshops, residencies and exhibitions on performance art in Pakistan, nurturing young artists to make authentic and honest performative works. From these group of artists, one observes a group of women artists coming forth, who engaged with the medium on a deeper meditative level, unearthing their potential and surfacing with performances that question not only their relationship with their body but the society that has deeply impacted their consciousness.

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Figure 2. Nayyab Naveed, *The world will wither with me*. From House Residency Archives, House Archive, 2018.

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Figure 3. Rabeea Qamar, *Untitled*. From House Residency Archives, House Archive, 2018.

They have created work that is courageous, engaging and melodic, enticing the audience to pause and listen to the chords they are striking. Their engagement with the medium and performative works directly informs the broader dialogue around the gendered body, and how it is being experienced and observed in the Pakistani social framework.

The current performance art narrative being structured in Pakistan is daring. Structured outside the conventional academic or institutional framework of art making, the work produced is actively informing the discovery of the body. It is a state of deeper inquiry where artists are borrowing directly from their personal lives, tearing deep into experiences; raw, unedited, vulnerable and exposed.

A group of young women artists rises, marching forward with a warrior-like sensibility, and claiming their place as culture makers ensuing a relevant question forward, why are women artists engaging with the performative arts in Pakistan? Like many countries, in Pakistan art is

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Figure 4. Abeera Saleem, *Untitled*. From House Residency Archives, House Archive, 2018.



Figure 5. Hamna Khalid, *Sink*. From Exhibition view *We've Been Waiting for your*, Yousafrrxx, 2019.

heavily influenced by the demands of the commodifying market. One observes decades of male centric, market-driven art making as a singular creative model in place. One wonders, is that the absolute approach to art making? These young women artists bring forth a parallel narrative of art making that challenges prior standards of self-expression and creative solace. It is a known fact that a live performative art work cannot be bought or sold immediately, and yet it is slightly astounding to witness artists invest their time and resources in a medium that identifies its evident monetary curbs. Why do these artists continue to make performative works? The answer lies in the possibility that it is not in the monetary revenue generated by the artwork where the artists are seeking their imperative gratification, rather, within their absorbing yet wounded and profound sociocultural and anthropological investigation.

With that in context, let's look further into what the performative experience entails? A state

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of going into a performative zone is a rather abstract metaphysical experience. It is essential to recognize that a performative experience exists amidst a distinct shift (within conflict and vulnerability) in the being, that manifests in the body. Within that shift, the body departs from the *state of being* and enters into a *state of performing body*. This crossing can be traced through identifying three modalities of the performative body; *departure*, third space and *inhabiting* (Jozi, 2019, p. 22-25).

Departure is where the body releases from its physical constraints and transcends into a charged space which allows it to further experience physiological, emotional or mental conflicts. This deeper experience borrows a lot from a shaman like presence, affinities of which are often challenging to articulate, and rather can only be experienced. It is the moment of coming one with oneself. The *departure* allows for the physical body to transcend, carefully emitting a sense of detachment from the environment, becoming one with the inner self, birthing thoughts that are self-reflective and feelings that do not belong to this corporeal world.

This detached body opens space for it to step into the *third space* that is neither physical nor mental, it is the in-between space of being, that allows the body to look at itself from a disconnected space. It is a space of heightened warmth that instigates the body to harness a cocoon, placing the physical body into a nest of comfort while liberating the mind. The mind wanders from the space, into an extreme solace-like oblivion. Oblivion full of stillness and inaudibility, where no worldly sound intrudes or disobeys. From here rises the performative body, shedding away all known worldly restraints, becoming a being of freedom, that seeks for no affirmation, or declaration. The body comes in-sync with its demons, its anxieties, its genius. The performative body seeks nothing but to come at-par with its inner being, its inner storm.

It is when the storm has passed, the body rocks back into the mortal heaviness of the flesh, feeling the weight of its physical presence, awakening from the *third space* and fusing back into the state of the physical being – the modality of *inhabiting*. *Inhabiting* identifies as the

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immediate culminating moment of a performance as the body lingers to find its somatic space again. It is a union of the being, the body and the environment, all negotiating a path to connect back with the material world.

As the body shifts from state of being to *state of performing*, it experiences mental idiosyncrasies, assimilating the body into a state of oneness with the mind. South Asian study of mysticism, signifies these moments of oneness of the body and mind as *transcendence*. While this has profound intellectual and spiritual relevance in eastern philosophy and mysticism, it reverberates vast connotations in performance art.

Hazrat Inayat Khan describes this state of transcendence as *Vibrations* (Khan, 1996). He states that the body manifests through vibrations that exude from the source of the body and enter into bodies and beings around it; communicating, collaborating and connecting with them.

“The Life Absolute from which has sprung all that is felt, seen, and perceived, and into which all again merges in time, is a silent, motionless and eternal life which among the Sufis is called *Zat*. Every motion that springs forth from this silent life is a vibration and a creator of vibrations. Within one vibration are created many vibrations; as motion causes motion so the silent life becomes active in a certain part, and creates every moment more and more activity, losing thereby the peace of the original silent life. It is the grade of activity of these vibrations that accounts for the various planes of existence. These planes are imagined to differ from one another, but in reality, they cannot be entirely detached and made separate from one another. The activity of vibrations makes them grosser, and thus the earth is born of the heavens” (Khan, 1996).

C.S. Walter talks about the deep connection between dance, the artist, and the mystical, and how it has the ability to fulfill our intrinsic desire of liberation and self-actualization (Walter, 2014). According to Walter we all function in this world as consumers, in the search of fulfilling our needs. He posits Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a fundamental road map to today’s

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consumerist world. Our yearning in trying to understand the world, connecting with the world and search for meaning to life can be achieved by fulfilling the premier need – the need of self-actualization. He argues how social dance (dance of a rather unchoreographed nature), free movement and performance lends towards our spiritual moments of transcendence assisting our self-actualization needs.

“For connection, they are looking for relationships based on caring with other people and higher beings, as well as themselves. In terms of transcendence, they want to feel calm, peaceful, and fulfilled. What I’m saying is that in doing social dance consumers may also form these consumptive and personal linkages, formulating an unspoken experience. It is this proximity to mystical dance practice, either in reality or in our minds, that leads to feeling fulfilled and being at peace with the world” (Walter, 2014, p. 34).

Performance art exists at the moments of understanding and connecting with the world, blurring the lines between life and art, body and being, self and other. Through using movement and gesture as primary modes of expression, it establishes a more democratic state of being, that aids towards raw human connection, relatability, communion and truth.

The Pakistani art community has witnessed a group of young women artists who are engaging with the medium of performance art with similar authenticity. They are probing the cultural, social and political environment of the country, and bringing their bodies into an exhibitory space and a vulnerable state of openness that can be challenging and sometimes daunting.

These young artists are not only challenging the status quo of the art market, they are un-chaining the perception to view and recognize the intricacies of the human experience. These young artists happen to be women and one can’t help but wonder, is it just a coincidence? I ask again, why are women artists engaging with the performative arts in Pakistan?

Any attempts in answering this question first warrants a deep screening of a woman’s journey of growing up in Pakistan. The journey she takes on from a young age, that can be extremely

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Figure 6. Ajiya Asif, *Regeneration*. From Exhibition view *Body Becoming*, House Archive, 2018.

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Figure 7. Fatima Butt, *You Melt my Heart into Bits and Pieces*. From *Exhibition view We've Been waiting for you*, 2019.

lonesome and alienating. The stories that she writes about herself from a very young age, not knowing how these stories in fact write her. How the myriad of incidences identify who she is, and what she is about to become. The challenges she faces inaugurate from her domestic environment which is furnished with members, near and close, who gaze at her and her body, and silhouette an array of decisions for her, about her. The sporadic accounts of violations force her to suppress her gender expression, and seldom out of fear of strong defilements make her censor herself infinitely, and bury her being into an interminable gully of non-being.

Women in Pakistan are coming up for air as they negotiate to reclaim their bodies and identities. They have lived under the fear of political, social and religious censorship for a very long time, suppressing their conflicts and vulnerabilities. Their buried stories are now sprouting their way to the surface. Women artists are finding the courage to unearth their conflicts and

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experience their vulnerabilities. It is now that they are bringing it to the brim, all that was buried deep down; the liabilities, anguishes, mis-lies, and untruths. Performance art provides these women artists a safe space to allow their bodies to face their insecurities and fears – head on. This safe space brings forth stories of surrender, isolation, voyeurism, powerlessness and empowerment.

The feminist performance art theory illustrates moments of tremor and shock as we study charged performances and radicalization of the female body. Performances of Carolee Schneemann *Eye/Body* (1963), *Meat Joy* (1964) and her seminal performance work *Interior Scroll* (1975), performative photographs of Hannah Wilke titled *S. O. S. — Startification Object Series* (1974), Shigeko Kubota's performance *Vagina Painting* (1965) and Ana Mendieta's *Body Tracks* (1981). These works have produced a cultural force shaping the feminist theory and discourse worldwide. Performance art by women artists in the 1960s and 70s delivered a political and aesthetical shift in means to address issues of identity and sexuality.

Rebecca Schneider talks about the dynamics and psyche of consumption and how women artists activated an empowered space of criticality towards dealing with dichotomies such as male/female bodies, object/subject, viewer/viewing and representation/embodiment (Schneider, 2002).

“The male/female binarism was thus confused. Was the artist making or finding the object or was the object making the artist? In the 1960s many chose to believe that indeed the object was making the artist” (Schneider, 2002, p. 37).

In Pakistan, women performance artists come forth with an unwavering resolve addressing issues of identity, voyeurism and exploitation.

Nayyab Naveed, a young artist and writer based in Lahore, strikes very intimate chords by extracting raw and emotionally exhausting personal narratives. Her performances draw from the gut, bringing you forth to her experiences of loss and aggression. Naveed opens a door into

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the world of a young girl's life, churning out untold traumas and annihilations, sharing her story bit by bit.

Naveed takes on a role of a story teller demonstrating a deep sensitivity to her craft by doing performances that lure the viewer into her world, some familiar while some peculiar. She draws from experiences of being a young girl growing up in Pakistan, and the interpersonal relationships that prescribe her journey from childhood to adolescence and into womanhood. Naveed toils between the inadvertent moments of weakness and aggression. She flirts with pain and seduces danger. She creates environments using materials that are precarious, adding a heightened sense of danger and sinister, and exposing her body to immediate threats. Naveed's demeanor draws the audience into her world, where she exudes a great sense of naivety and purity. She inserts poetry and spoken word into her performances which adds another layer to her work. The sound of her soft voice weighs onto the imagery of her striking and provocative performances.

During one of the workshops conducted by House Limited, Naveed performed an impromptu performance on the streets of Lahore titled *Lingering by the roadside* (2018). She performed this work in the middle of the bazaars around the Walled City of Lahore, a part of the city that is highly populated by the working-class residents and tourists. The streets of the bazaars stay busy all day long. They have a caravan-like sensibility where pedestrians, wagon carts, motorcycles and cars all circuit as an integrated, one whole system.

Amidst this commotion, Naveed begins her performance by tying the back of her kameez exposing the upper seams of her shalwar. Naveed doesn't undress or expose her body at any point. She however exposes the crotch line of her shalwar which is a concealed part of the garment, and exposing that in Pakistan evokes a certain bareness, warranting unwanted gazes and attention. She wraps her hair with her dupatta in a loose turban and lies down on the road with her legs in the air, holding her feet with her hands and waving the feet in the air. She

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stays in this position as the rickshaws drive by and people begin to gaze at her as she holds the provoking posture in the middle of the road. It's a theatrical moment as lustful men try to ease their discomfort by finding humor in the situation, and women spy with disbelief from the corner of their eye. After staying in this position for approximately fifteen minutes, Naveed gets up, dusts off her shirt, unties the turban and the back of her kameez and walks off.

This to some, and quite accurately, might appear to be a provoking or a heroic act of a woman challenging the male gaze. According to Naveed, the seed of the performance lied in her intention to live a moment in the life of a man on the street and experience the luxury of complete autonomy with which he can display his body in the public. Naveed desired to experience the power to just be, mirroring how men can lie down, touch themselves or dress unhindered. Such quotidian acts are a novelty for women in Pakistan. The highly charged male energy on the streets in Pakistan has trained the eye to find such exhibitionism by men extremely banal. It is plausible that a behavior of this nature if enacted by a man may not cause any inconvenience or stand out in any way, but if done by a woman produces distress, appearing to be an act of rebellion that may warrant silencing or censorship. Naveed's performance ensues a jarring revelation of gender exhibition and critiques human perception.

On conversing with Naveed, she talks about the beats of the performance. She states that her body was oscillating between her intention of carving a space of comfort for herself, and the actual performative experiences that felt threatening to her. Naveed further exclaimed that to her surprise, a few moments into the performance the bareness and threat slowly started to wear off. She felt time passing slowly and her body floating on water. With the passing time the internalized weight of danger, anguish, pain and melancholic withdrawals that she carried all her life, suddenly started to lift, elevating a serenity within. As she decided to end the performance her immediate response was that of feeling relieved, allowing her body to become a vessel to experience the amplified anguish, and through this anguish, she set free.



Figure 8. Nayyab Naveed, *Lingering by the roadside*. From House Residency Archives, House Archive, 2018.

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Another seminal performance by Naveed is *Song to the Siren* (2018) which she performed as part of an exhibition of live performances titled *Body Becoming* curated by House Limited in Lahore in 2018. The charged evening brought together young artists exploring themes of endurance, vulnerability, and ethnic and gendered discriminations.

Disclaimer: No birds were harmed or killed for the purpose of the performance. They were collected and bought by the artist from the Tollinton Bird Market Lahore, where these birds died naturally from overcrowding and disease in the cages they were kept in.

Naveed's a performance draws from her personal journey of loss and injury. Naveed reads out notes from her diary that hang loosely from dried branches in the garden. As she delivers her poetry, she unmask traces of her misgivings, loss and erasure. Slowly she begins to dig out dead birds (that she had previously buried) from the ground. She holds the birds with care and caution as she continues the performance. She carries the birds and recites calmly as if she is conversing with the dead birds, sharing her secrets with them and making a silent deal with them to be her secret keepers and confidants. She establishes a deep connection with the birds during the performance and it appears as if the pain she feels in telling her secrets out loud, only the dead birds share, and amidst the sea of people watching her, only the dead birds can hear her. The performance mines through deep personal pits of defeat and despair. Naveed travels between emotions of anger and abandon to shame and deep mourning. She unburies the dead birds one at a time, picking them up with care and reciting to them. For Naveed, the unburying of the dead birds is like unburying her personal childhood traumas.

Ana Mendieta, a Cuban-American artist toys with the theme of absence and loss in her performance *Body Tracks* (1982). The performance is transgressive and traumatic as Mendieta stands silently with her hands drenched with animal blood. The performance is a brisk gesture of her drawing long vertical lingering marks on the wall using her bloody hands and forearms. She walks out of the gallery after the performance ends leaving behind the eerie traces of her

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Figure 9. Nayyab Naveed, *Song to the Siren*. From Exhibition view *Body Becoming*, House Archive. 2018.

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Figure 10. Nayyab Naveed, *Song to the Siren*. From Exhibition view *Body Becoming*, House Archive. 2018.

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presence. Mendieta creates ghostly traces in her performative works, as a way to share her hollowing desire to unite with her homeland and the Mother Earth. These traces are forbearing and a silent protest against her lost identity. Naveed's performances resonate with similar ethereal abandon, feeling of alienation and a pursuit to find her lost identity. The dead birds in Naveed's performance and the bloody traces in Mendieta's work mirror in activating a sense of loss, while touching the audience deeply, leaving them with a gasping and choking melancholy.

Another woman artist Kanwal Tariq, based in Lahore performed *The Essence of What Fades* (2018) as part of the exhibition *Body Becoming*. Tariq creates a performance installation, a plinth size block of wet clay mounted perfectly with sharp edges and a clean structure. The performance begins with a woman performer lying on the plinth. Her body is in a reclining posture, head resting on the plinth, eyes closed, appearing still and at peace. Tariq begins the performance by acutely moving around the plinth as she starts to tear off the clay from the sides of the plinth, sculpting it on to the body lying on it.

She gnaws briskly with her hands, acting on the clay, approaching it with extreme aggression, slowly disrupting the pristine structure and transferring the wet clay on to the body. The diminishing plinth gradually starts enveloping the body, taking over the physical presence of life, and graying it out with mud. The structure of the plinth morphs into a burning candle form, leaving behind traces of its existence, a memory that is withered, blurred and metamorphosed. It is slowly turning into a relic.

Kate Gilmore, an American artist in her performance *Through the Claw* (2011) uses similar hostile actions of construction and aggressive obliteration of a clay plinth structure. For her the clay structure symbolizes the social construct of expectations from women to be soft and gently mothering. She destroys the edifice in hopes to free herself of this social burden. The performers wearing white dresses attack the structure, climbing over it and violently dismantling the pristine masculine minimalist cube. In this performance Gilmore creates moments of revolt

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Figure 11. Kanwal Tariq, *The Essence of What Fades*. From Exhibition view *Body Becoming*. House Archive. 2018.

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Figure 12. Kanwal Tariq, *The Essence of What Fades*. From Exhibition view *Body Becoming*, House Archive, 2018.

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and challenges the common assertion of toxic femininity as the women performers demolish the entire structure. Gilmore creates moments of messiness, disaster, frustration, humor and hopelessness.

Sue Scott writes about the subversive feminist tropes in Gilmore's work as – “swinging a sledgehammer through plaster wood, doggedly pulling herself up a shaft, roller skating up a machine, or carrying excruciatingly heavy blocks of plaster. Most often, she is dressed in high heels, an evening gown, or a cocktail dress, highly coded clothing better suited for sipping tea or drinking champagne than ripping out drywall” (Scott, 2013).

The charged gnawing and deformation of clay structure in Gilmore's performance *Through the Claw* echoes in Tariq's performance. There is a distinct shift in the energy as the performance progresses, and one witness a slow and calculated demise of the structure. This beautiful crumbling of order is spell-bound.

The performance has a spell-like effect, as Tariq creates highly theatrical moments during the performance. She uses intense light and the consequent deep and hallowing shadows over the body and the plinth as a way to amplify the destruction at play. The positioning of the two bodies performing together borrows similar painterly sensibilities and horrors of the withering body in the painting *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, bringing a Caravaggio to life. Tariq channelizes the provocation in her performance, making the site aesthetically charged and formatively monumental.

I take a pause and cautiously come back to my question, why are women artists responding attentively to performance art in Pakistan? Its significant to probe the cultural climate which plays a major role in shaping the young artistic genius in the country. In Pakistan the female body straddles between ingenuity and concealment. It exists at the cusp of the balance of power, navigating between powerlessness and empowerment. The young female body is questioning social conformity and recognizes the urgency to find balance and means to living and feeling as



Figure 13. Kanwal Tariq, *The Essence of What Fades*. From Exhibition view *Body Becoming*, House Archive, 2018.

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a whole.

“Woman... is narcissistic, in fact, but only by phallic mandate... She is mutilated, amputated, humiliated... because of being a woman” (Irigaray, 1974, p. 113).

Is the female body a mere spectacle?

Does the discomfort, embarrassment and shame of being reduced to a mere spectacle prevent a lot of women from being fully free? Yes, it is true and no matter how much we deny or evolve, we still find ourselves experiencing a certain fear of the voyeur. Regardless, it is amidst this reality that the woman continues to be.

If the fear of being a spectacle is intrinsically so transgressive and butchering, then why are women artists intensifying this exhibition by becoming a performative body?

Because,

I am a spectacle, and therefore I am.

There is a solace in becoming a spectacle. Through these performances, the spectacle breaks all internal conformities. It is in the intoxication of rising beyond the physical body and becoming an empowered version of oneself, in experiencing the writhing shift in power, and in controlling the narrative, that the women artists in Pakistan are reclaiming their bodies and consciousness. The spectacle is not the antagonist, the spectacle becomes comfort.

Spectacle can often be confused with narcissism which has often been linked to femininity. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir explores the notion of narcissism and femininity, and finds it to be a very suppressed and reductive interpretation of the female spectacle (Beauvoir, 1952). “It has sometimes been maintained that narcissism is the fundamental attitude of all women... Woman, not being able to fulfill herself through projects and objectives, is forced to find her reality in the immanence of her person” (Beauvoir, 1952, p. 592).

While this convenient connection between narcissism and female identity is predictable, it is regressive and rudimentary. Spectacle making in performance art independent of narcissism,

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Figure 14. Aleena Qadeer, *Untitled*. From House Residency Archives, House Archive, 2018.

provides a framework to the female body to experience their reality and boundary. For the female performative body, spectacle instigates moments of sublimity and liberation. Any or all voyeuristic gaze must not be used as a parameter to furnish the interpretation of a performance, or reduce the body to a mere sexualized being.

Lucy Lippard addresses the notion of the female sexualized body and narcissism as a tool of critique of the male gaze, which is disparaging to the authentic female body's creative process. "Men can use beautiful, sexy women as neutral objects or surfaces, but when women use their own faces and bodies, they are immediately accused of narcissism. . . . Because women are considered sex objects, it is taken for granted that any woman who presents her nude body in public is doing so because she thinks she is beautiful. She is a narcissist. . ." (Lippard, 2015, p. 341)

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Figure 15. Maha Sohail, *She stood like a Healing Sun split on Sky Floor*. From Exhibition view *Body Becoming*, House Archive, 2018.

The spectacle frees, and feeds in reinforcing the belief, that yes, I exist. Between the vulnerability and aggression, the body finds its self. The warrior-like nature of this spectacle empowers the body.

Is it the nature of the medium that exonerates all genders to participate in it? it is simply not true, however the conversations around the sexualized body surface recurrently in the feminist theory. It is in the refuge of the performative body that the women artists are putting their security at risk and stepping past being mere sexualized bodies.

Works done by these women artists reincarnates the female angst. We are looking into their mind and through their eyes at a moment recreated by these artists which is highly voyeuristic. These performances test the threshold of their aggression and vulnerabilities, and delivers a bareness which is beyond somatic. They are discovering a language to articulate their unde-

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Figure 16. Maha Sohail, *She stood like a Healing Sun split on Sky Floor*. From Exhibition view *Body Becoming*, House Archive, 2018.

clared emotions.

Performance art in Pakistan comes ahead with a purpose beyond conventional art making, creative expression, or an exotic mode of exhibitionism. It serves to inform a vessel and open the door into the space of liberation, truly placing the body in a perplexing space of prayer.

They feel protected, they feel liberated, they feel free.

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