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body becoming

A culmination of
workshops,
performances
and an exhibition

Project led & curated by
Natasha Jozi

**the body
is not
performing**

**the body
itself is
performance**

Performance as a metaphor for thought

Aasim Akhtar

What does Performance Art – as concept, as practice – offer in this particular moment of cultural crisis marked by deluges distinctly personal and political? Perhaps it invites a rethinking of orientation in relationship to space, to language, to composition, to articulation, and to ethics. To engage in performance art is to position oneself in relation to another, to participate in a scene of address that anticipates and requires a particular mode of attention, even at times against our will. Facing another, we encounter precariousness as the condition of address. I imagine the work of the performance artist as one possibility of sensuous address – a dialogic opening in which art not only is looked at but also looks back, igniting a tremulous relationship in the ways that we experience and respond.

Choreography is a metonymic condition in performance that moves between corporeal and cerebral conjecture to tell the stories of these many encounters between dance, sculpture, light, space, and perception through a series of stutters, steps, trembles, and spasms. The writing down of movements is never simply pure description or representation, but it is always a directive conditioned by prevailing notational devices, technologies, and pedagogical imperatives.

One can refer to 'still acts' as a performance of suspension, a corporeally based interruption of modes of imposing flow. Drawing attention to the ways we place ourselves in relation to history in the present and how we make sense of these connections through language and through art is never obvious or direct but is quite precarious and tenuous. To feel the precarious, to be held under its sway, is to breathe in history as present tense and sit within it in fields of grass or arid deserts or under white gallery lights. For me this is the promise of art – to imagine strategies for articulating something like precariousness through a blazing shape, a sudden shock or perhaps a moment of rapture that is missing from our current thinking.

While place identifies a certain specificity or location, it is also informed by the context of the space that it resides within. House

has aligned place and movement within its folds to reveal how space is not simply a natural or nondiscursive entity but is in fact produced. Social space organises a relational matrix through the forms of encounter, assembly and simultaneity that generates an incessant traffic between temporality and spatiality. This description of space as a function of both time and space is intimately tied with a valuation of the labour of making performance art.

A landscape has no fixed meaning, no privileged vantage point. It is oriented only by the itinerary of the passerby...the myriad incidents, minute facts either overlooked or deliberately ignored. Here, landscape is a passage; the only relief is that of the event. These events, or anecdotes or encounters within the landscape articulate its horizon, defining a spatial and temporal presence.

Perhaps, performance art also incites a mode of 'critical outrage' as it enumerates so many other ways of living, of consciousness along edges, as always experienced, cried and screamed. With performance art, House stages a conversation in which artwork can touch even across distance not only as an artistic strategy and discipline but also as an intrinsically theoretical and critical practice.

To perform is to make of one's body a subtracted form, even if immobile, of multiple forces. To show that a gesture is not the simple result of a muscular movement and a directional intention, but something much more subtle and dialectic: the encounter of at least two confronted movements – those in any case of the body and the milieu – producing, at the very point of their balance, a zone of arrest, of immobility, of syncope. A kind of silence of the gesture. The bird as a dancer or dancer as bird, is this what Helene Cixous had in mind when she wrote of an "airborne swimmer." Both Didi-Huberman and Cixous choreograph human touching animal touching substance, rendering the choreographic as an atmospherics of encounter along its violent and erotic edges as the bird dives to kill her prey, so the swimmer laughs her desire.

Charting and shifting paradigms

Natasha Jozi

The history of performance art documented until today exhibits a periodic vacillation, where when artists radically experimented with the medium to chart a diverse creative process, they also abandoned it thenceforth. Contrary to the traditional forms of art such as painting, sculpture or even photography which display a somewhat linear progression in the formal as well as conceptual inquiry, performance art or performative art practices have bourgeoned episodically over the years, and often without much connection between each episode.

The narrative of positioning the role of the artist as creator and director of public spectacle finds its roots stemming from the renaissance. It has been documented that during one of the mock naval battles arranged by Polidoro da Caravaggio in 1589 in Florence, Leonardo di Vinci dressed his performers as planets while they recited and performed about the Golden Age. The use of drama and script infused with real life materials to build the arena, informed and largely contributed to the later conversations of the use of body as medium in art.

During the early 20th century one finds the intention behind performances by the futurists, surrealists and the cubists as more propaganda than actual production. They were largely disruptive, offensive and charged. The futurist manifestos complimenting the performances exhibited inherently brought a certain kind of discipline to this madness, and furthermore lent a critical lens informing the boundaries and limits of performance making and doing processes.

It was not until late 20th century when performance art came to be known, accepted and practiced as a form of expression. The artists of this era blurred not only the boundaries of art, but also the boundaries of performativity. Performance as life, performance as the abstract body, performance as theatre, performance as day-to-day interactions, performance as the state of the body, performance as play, performance as ritual, performance as relating to space and time. At large it was the expression of dissidents who invested

profoundly to find other means to evaluate art experience in everyday life.

Amidst this distinct and charged history of performance art practices, Pakistan is christening the unfamiliar question; what performance art really is?

Inherently activist in its nature, performance art or live art takes a radical stance against the conventions of established art. Fueled by non-conformists, performance ploughs and breaks down categories indicating new directions. It directly challenges the status quo, art market and the art making process. Furthermore, performative art practices not only broadens the scope of creative expression, it also informs the relationship between the viewer and art experience.

With the history of this permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, House channelizes the anarchic, esoteric, shamanistic, instructive and provocative nature of this art form, and is determined to take art directly to the public. Founded in 2017, House has worked closely with individuals from a variety of disciplines that fully embrace 'the live' as a serious artistic medium.

The selected artists participating and showcasing their performative works defy the notion of art as commodity. House inherently explores the notion of "City as a Performing Organism". The city provides an interesting anchor point for situating body as material, the psychological quotient of space, and symbolic relationship between body and the varied agencies and stimuli in the city. The works produced by the artists have been components of cerebral propositions and ongoing experiments, continuously questioning and expanding the scope of their investigations while assembling new works and developing original performances.

House operates as an active laboratory of ideas translating initial gestures, funnelling critical contribution and providing a platform to shape the contemporary performance art landscape of Pakistan.

Body Becoming

October 6, 2018

Body Becoming is a result of a year working with creative practitioners to investigate performance and how it creates and transforms the body. It aims to bring new perspectives to artistic endeavours and to situate art practice outside of traditional spaces. The primary focus is on creating dialogue between body and city by authentically engaging with both.

The larger tradition of performance art was largely unknown in Pakistan until quite recently. Performance art is usually conflated with theatre and therefore often takes on the role of spectacle to be consumed in a voyeuristic manner. This understanding of performance leaves very little room for it to grow or develop as an art form uniquely as it leaves experiential, material, emotional, interactive, or any number of facets of performance unexplored. In an endeavour to step away from a one dimensional or conventional idea of theatrical performance art, House has gathered young artists and non-artists experimenting with a wide range of themes and ideas relating to performance.

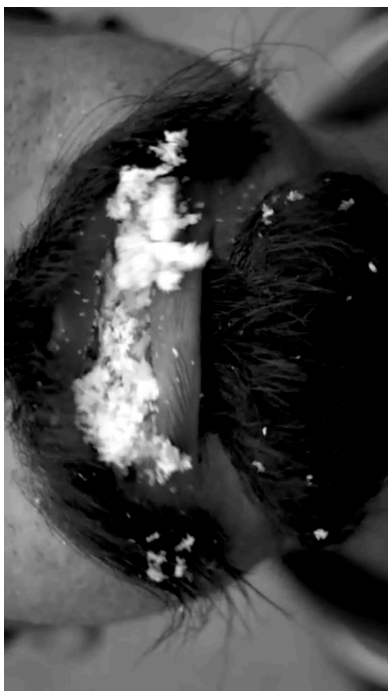
This exhibition intends to provide an amalgamation of diverse approaches and subject matters of performance art in our context. Primarily, most of the artists are dealing with bodily experience, its limitations, material effects, the ends of bodily endurance, relationships to other bodies, the body's temporality and changing meanings in social contexts. Their works span a diverse set of themes, some universal, and some uniquely ethnic and gendered. Each artist approaches their role in the performance and the role of the audience differently, whether they are begging a reaction from the audience, looking to portray their experience to them, making a point, or looking for a purely internal experience. Our goal is to explore the body and its performativity in order to become acquainted with our own subjectivity, and to situate our subjectivity in our lived reality.



Untitled

You use words to communicate, to describe, to understand. Your ability to combine words together to create cohesion is a trait unique to humanity. Yet, words are inherently without purpose. These words you use are merely stamps on the surface of reality. They become smudged and indecipherable with time. What use are words then? How are we communicating then?

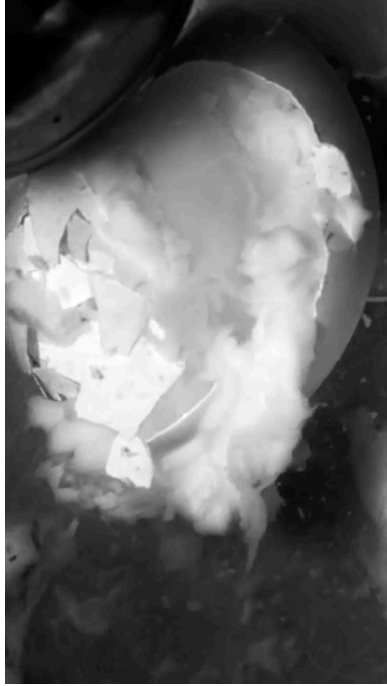
Abrar Ahmed



Blue print burqa

In and out. This performance presents a visualization of an interpersonal relationship through the repetitive nature of the act being depicted by the performers. Their interaction raises questions about the underlying nature of such relationships and how the people involved affect each other's continued investment into the frameworks where these actions are reproduced.

Ahmed Khan



Regeneration

We all live within our own bubbles. Whether they be comprised of our political beliefs, social status or class, our bubbles keep provide us with security. We take our bubbles with us everywhere. They comprise part of our very being. This performance illustrates the way we all carry our bubbles and how they end up affecting the way we interact with the world around us

Ajiya Asif



Pain of existence

Drip down onto the flesh. Wash away the unwashable sin. One drop to cleanse the ocean of impurity and water the dust of the human soul. What is left when all is washed away? It will always remain unclear.

Arsalan Afzal



Metaphor

Embrace the Suffocation. Accept Abandonment. Take in the Claustrophobia. Become one with the Isolation. Become Resistance. Just breathe.

Haider Shah



Our democracy has been hacked

Noise, racket, clangor. An overloading of stimulus. Meaning and meaninglessness blend together in the swirling mess of sound and fury. This performance seeks to represent the overflowing nature of life itself that comes through from an overwhelming ease of communication. Where does the noise start? Where does the communication stop? Where does the noise end? Where does the communication begin?

Hamna Khalid



She stood like a healing drop of sun spilt on the sky floor

Have you seen the beginning of times? / When even ocean and / the earth were toddlers in their/ Mother's laps / You heard then, the sucking of toes / The folk lullabies to hush the infants / You sang to them in a pitch all could hear / Beginning of times / It is a fortress / Desert and ocean meeting / I march on a line where desert meets the ocean / Passion meets the silent / I find myself, I lose myself / I march / Circumambulating the city / She waits / Qibla of the fortress / Queen in the centre / I march towards life / for life

Maha Sohail



I love you

Where do we go when we walk alongside each other? At what point do we stop walking together and start walking over each other? How long does it go on for? Why don't we stop? Where are we going? This performance is an attempt to contextualize and visualize the nature of most human relationships

Waleed Sajid & Aisha Suria



Song to the siren

Loss: A small word with an incomprehensible complexity. How can we begin to understand the breadth and depth of such a term? Any exploration of loss must contend with the inherent difficulty of communicating the concept beyond a shallow representation of the idea. This performance is predicated on transfixing upon loss and presenting it in a way that is open to the wide breadth of interpretation loss deserves.

Nayyab Naveed



The essence of what fades

To the Earth from whence you came. Return to your place of origin. Be consumed by that which gave you birth. Sink and become part of it once more. You are in it and it is in you. You are it and it is you.

Kanwal Tariq

House Artist Residency (HAR)

The House Artist Residency (HAR) has been implemented to support experimental modes of performance and open up new pathways in artistic discourse in Pakistan. HAR 2018, a set of three workshops, each spanning three days, is designed to allow artists from all disciplines to explore the performativity of their environment and body in everyday life in Lahore. Experiential workshops, discussion sessions, and exploratory walks through the city allow participants to break away from the boundaries of social convention, providing them with an opportunity to begin trusting the relationships between familiar and foreign bodies in a shared space. Participants explore performance as a communicative action, staging of shifting identities, a means of storytelling, and a collaboration within encounters.

These activities pave the way for participants to think of their environment in unique ways, experiencing how the line between public and private, body and its surroundings, and body and medium can be blurred. This allows them to enter public spaces in the city with these boundaries already broken and new avenues for interaction possible. Through replicating these activities in all sorts of spaces - crowded, secluded, abandoned, imagined, ignored, lived, subaltern, and so on - the artists connect with the people and the city. The workshops culminate in a set of performances which participants either perform themselves or orchestrate within the city.

While the format of each of these workshops remains largely consistent, the themes and approaches of participants towards performances vary and shift according to group dynamics, conversations, and relative spaces of activity. The common thread has been the role of the body in our multifaceted South Asian urban context.

House Artist Residency – 01

HAR 2018 - 01 worked largely with the external space - the material, the visual, the tactile, the audible, and the communicative. The participants focused on relationships between body and environment; tackling issues such as gender performativity, public spectacle vs public shame, and common symbolic language. Several performances involved interventions in public spaces, either observing reactions of the audience or attempting to invoke responses from them.





Abrar Ahmed's performance centred around the interpretation of common symbols present in day to day life. He played on different interpretations of '#' as either a hashtag or a game of knots and crosses, marking public places with this symbol to see whether people took it as an invitation to play. This performance explored how meanings associated with such a symbol change over time or across context.

Abrar Ahmed



Anas Abbas borrowing methods from relational aesthetics performed a participatory performance where he acted as an instigator for impromptu public interaction. Abbas tapped into the already performative aspect of the park Bagh-e-Jinnah, a common site for young boys in Lahore to take staged photographs of each other. He posed in front of a camera set on a tripod in various parts of the park, and shortly thereafter several boys came to advise him on how best to photograph himself, posed with him and asked him to take their own pictures. Through the imitation of their own performative actions in the park, Abbas prompted these boys to engage in and critique his own performance.

Anas Abbas



Aleena Qadeer intended to break the silence around tragedies that are often swept under the rug or considered too disturbing to talk about in public. In light of a then recent rape and murder of a young child in a nearby city, Qadeer read aloud a story of child abuse and murder through a loudspeaker in the middle of the Walled City of Lahore. By detailing such a story in public, Qadeer broke boundaries of both comfort and shame, making it unavoidable to face the reality of violence and child abuse in Pakistan.

Aleena Qadeer



Kanwal Tariq climbed atop a great, sprawling tree on a hill in Bagh-e-Jinnah, and wrapped its branches in a long sheet of black plastic. This performance was extremely visual, intertwining both natural and extremely synthetic materials through the labour of the artist's entire body. This culminated in a large tree covered in thin black plastic, an image of suffocation and conflict between nature and the man-made world.

Kanwal Tariq



Noreen Jahan used materials that she was already familiar with in her own artistic practice, but brought it to a new setting: she built a structure of bricks at the entrance of a private backyard. Her idea was to look at bricks as a form of structure making but also a source of division within space, and also see how such an act mediates relationships between people within those spaces. Interestingly, the owners of the space she performed in were extremely welcoming and even participated by facilitating her and helping her build the structure themselves.

Noreen Jahan



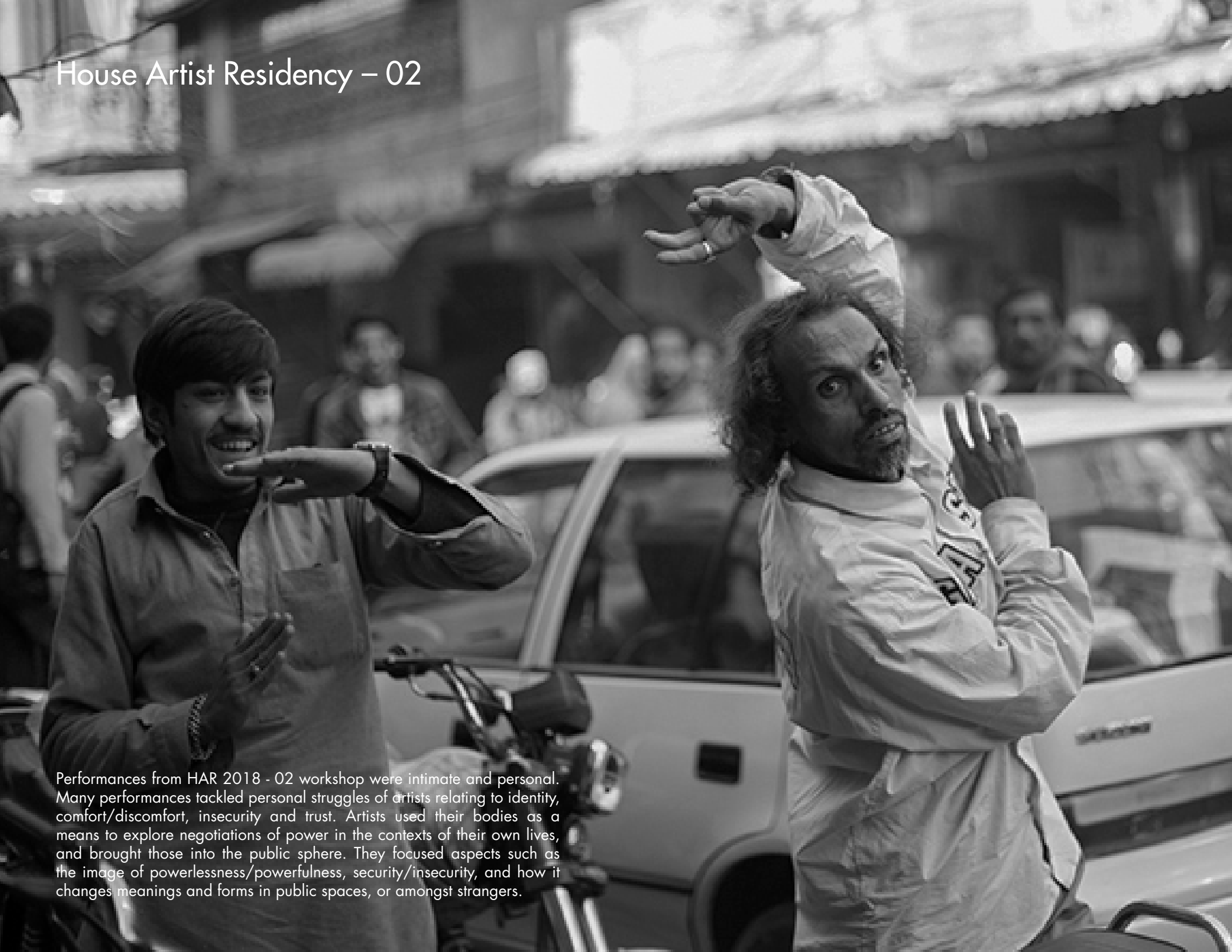
Sarah Mumtaz's concern was a personally motivated experience, as well as an intervention within the public environment of a park. She climbed a hill in the middle of Bagh-e-Jinnah, and constantly repeated a single phrase - "stop and smell the roses". Her audio performance revealed the genuine exhaustion and toll of her bodily experience through the laborious physical exercise of climbing, moving, stepping, and moving forward against gravity.

Sarah Mumtaz



Hidayat Marwat's work explored the idea of masking and gendered personas. He transformed himself into a dramatic, androgynous character through make up and walked through the Walled City of Lahore. This performance was intended as a sort of public intervention as well as a step outside of conventional gender roles for the artist.

House Artist Residency – 02



Performances from HAR 2018 - 02 workshop were intimate and personal. Many performances tackled personal struggles of artists relating to identity, comfort/discomfort, insecurity and trust. Artists used their bodies as a means to explore negotiations of power in the contexts of their own lives, and brought those into the public sphere. They focused aspects such as the image of powerlessness/powerfulness, security/insecurity, and how it changes meanings and forms in public spaces, or amongst strangers.



Abeera Saleem gave up control of herself and body during this performance. She provided Abu Huraira - a tea boy at a nearby tuck shop - with ropes, a shovel, and bricks, and instructed him to tie her up as he wished. Huraira buried her feet in the ground, placed bricks around them, and tied her whole body and face tightly to a tree in Bagh-e-Jinnah. She remained completely still and silent as passersby inquired if she was alright. The performance was designed to last until Huraira decided to untie her. This performance was an immersive experience in vulnerability and shifting power dynamics for Saleem, and would go on to inspire future works where she would allow her body to be handled, tied, and moved around by others.

Abeera Saleem



Ahmed Khan dealt with themes of security, gender, ethnicity and public appearance. Drawing on his Pashtun background, he used a blue shuttlecock burqa common in his hometown to symbolize a gendered and ethnic persona, and disrupted it by wearing it and driving a motorbike down the streets of Lahore. The public response was largely aggressive and caused him to fear for his own safety. His experience wearing it while driving allowed him to better understand what the garment means in a very material and sensory way.

Ahmed Khan



Nofal Omer's performance revolved around his personal relationship with his long hair as a form of rebellion against limitations on masculine appearance. Omer had his hair washed, styled, and dyed in an alley between two streets in the Walled City. He eventually became a spectacle for passersby, that led to the street being blocked by onlookers.

Nofal Omer



Risham Syed's performance was inspired by her relation to her appearance as a means for self-expression and identity. She took on the garb of a barber in the Walled City and offered to cut men's hair for free. By immersing herself in the mannerisms and practices of a men's barber, she was able to engage with customers as though she were a regular figure in their lives; trimming their beards, styling their hair, and exchanging jokes and anecdotes. This performance was not only about appearances and actions as markers of one's role amongst people, but was also about the artist's own experience of belonging and interacting with a space.

Risham Bhutta



Sabeen Ahsan's performance was an experiment in public interactions and speech. She sat before an empty chair in front of Quaid-e-Azam public library; a crisp white, imposing building that necessitates silence within it. Her aim was to see whether or how people may choose to engage in a conversation with her in a public space. By interacting with random pedestrians, she saw how many men and women decided to speak to her, and how gendered their responses to her silent presence were.

Sabeen Ahsan



Zoya Yalmaz's performance was personal and simple, but highly engaging and brought her out of her comfort zone. She performed sitting on a tree branch in Bagh-e-Jinnah, speaking in a loud but conversational voice. Her Urdu spoken word piece detailed her thoughts on being boxed into fixed gender categories from birth. Her major audience was a family sitting at the base of the tree, who had no interaction with her except intently listening to her poetry, and waving at her as she left.

Zoya Yalmaz



Usama Abid worked with the performative natures of postures and gestures. He chose an intersection of two paths in Bagh-e-Jinnah as his site of performance, standing in the middle of it and acting as a mirror to people walking by. By mimicking their mundane gestures, he highlighted the differences in everyone's movements and how their personas were expressed in their gait or stance. At certain points he also garnered a small audience who stopped to see how he might imitate their own walks or gestures.

Usama Abid



During HAR 2018 - 02 Abu Huraira - a tea boy at a nearby tuck shop at Bagh-e-Jinnah showed immense interest in the workshop, collaborated and helped participants in developing and carrying out their performances.*

* Abu Huraira was part of Abeera Saleem's final performance.

Abu Huraira
(Honorary Participant)

House Artist Residency – 03



Participants of HAR 2018 - 03 picked themes and subject matters with deep personal meaning, which simultaneously corresponded with overarching broader social issues. Artists blended social and personal experiences, placing highly intimate struggles in the context of political, urban, national, ethnic, or gendered experiences.



Arsalan Afzal took primary inspiration from deeply personal experiences of violence, while still maintaining a highly political imperative. His performance was extremely visual and sensory. He collected old newspapers concerned with the Army Public School Attack of 2014, covered them with chicken's blood, and hung them by meat hooks in a butcher shop in the Walled City Lahore. Afzal's last act of the performance was smearing his face with blood and walking out of the shop leaving the viewers extremely charged.

Arsalan Afzal



Hadiqa Amir's performance took place at Emporium Mall. The performance was inspired by the workshop and the experiences she had during various exercises in the city. Humour and spontaneity drove her to choose the escalator as her site of performance. She lay, sat, stood on the escalator and as she moved between the two floors she became a spectacle through her minor changes in her body language.

Hadiqa Amir



Khalid Sherwani's dramatic spoken word performance was an act of rebellion on his part - a rebellion against the status quo, patriarchal norms and toxic masculinity. The performance also helped him think about life as performance and how every act, intentional or otherwise, has a performative element to it.

Khalid Sherwani



Maha Sohail's performances long-duration performance was a meditative process involving crochet. To her it was like writing a script with a hook and a thread. As Sohail started making crocheted webs which moved downwards and upwards from the balcony, under which was a butcher's shop, pieces of meat stripped and hung. Soon the crocheted web became a part of the shop. As the performance unfolded the hanging crochet gradually started to resemble the meat which created various visual and contextual parallel.

Maha Sohail



"I was born with veins spreading across the skin on my cheeks, like branches very visible. The girls in my class were disquieted because of them, said my skin was too thin, and things inside me shouldn't be so loud. But I found my veins to be the loudest when my body grew sick, turning deep blue and poignant. I remained sick for years. My veins remained blue.

I found solace in the blue of my branches, and also in the brown of the branches in the space around me. I talked to trees instead of 9th grade girls because a tree listened and a tree understood. I underwent surgeries. I dropped out of school. I found myself impregnated by grief, and giving birth to loss. My performance was thus, a calm disruption of sorts. Something very close to my heart. An interpretation of the my experiences, a reliving of trauma." - Nayyab Naveed

Nayyab Naveed



Rabeea Qamar's performance was concerned with contrasting experiences and contexts of urban life and space. Location was central to her piece - it took place outside Emporium Mall, a huge shopping centre surrounded by tents, huts, and makeshift houses in shambles, occupied by the very workers that built it. She slipped a paper bag over her head, put a piece of bread in her mouth, and violently took apart a rose in her hands. The audience was barely able to stay out in the heat, and the harsh sunlight made it difficult to watch. Qamar was also concerned with the visual nature of her performance, with the dust and dirt of her surroundings contrasting with her metropolitan backdrop.

Rabeea Qamar



Talal Jamil was concerned with public encounters and the assumptions, calculations, distances, or ideas that we bring about one another. Jamil came to the inner city of Lahore in a suit and tie and asked the residents for a job. This performance spoke directly to the context and format of the workshop of how one interacts with the residents of the Walled City. Jamil tapped into the spontaneity of such an interaction, looking to see what sort of possible barriers exist, how imagined they are and how real; how our appearances, tones of voice, language, and dispositions shape them, and how possible it may be to break away from them, if at all.

Talal Jamil



"Tired of cis men and their supposed right to my body, I performed a spoken word at Iqbal Tharra in Walled city, Lahore. The poem called them out on their toxicity towards "their" women, or whom they claim to be their property." - Sabahat Aziz

Sabahat Aziz

**we do not
either just
perform, or
experience**

**we live on the
line between
experience and
performance**

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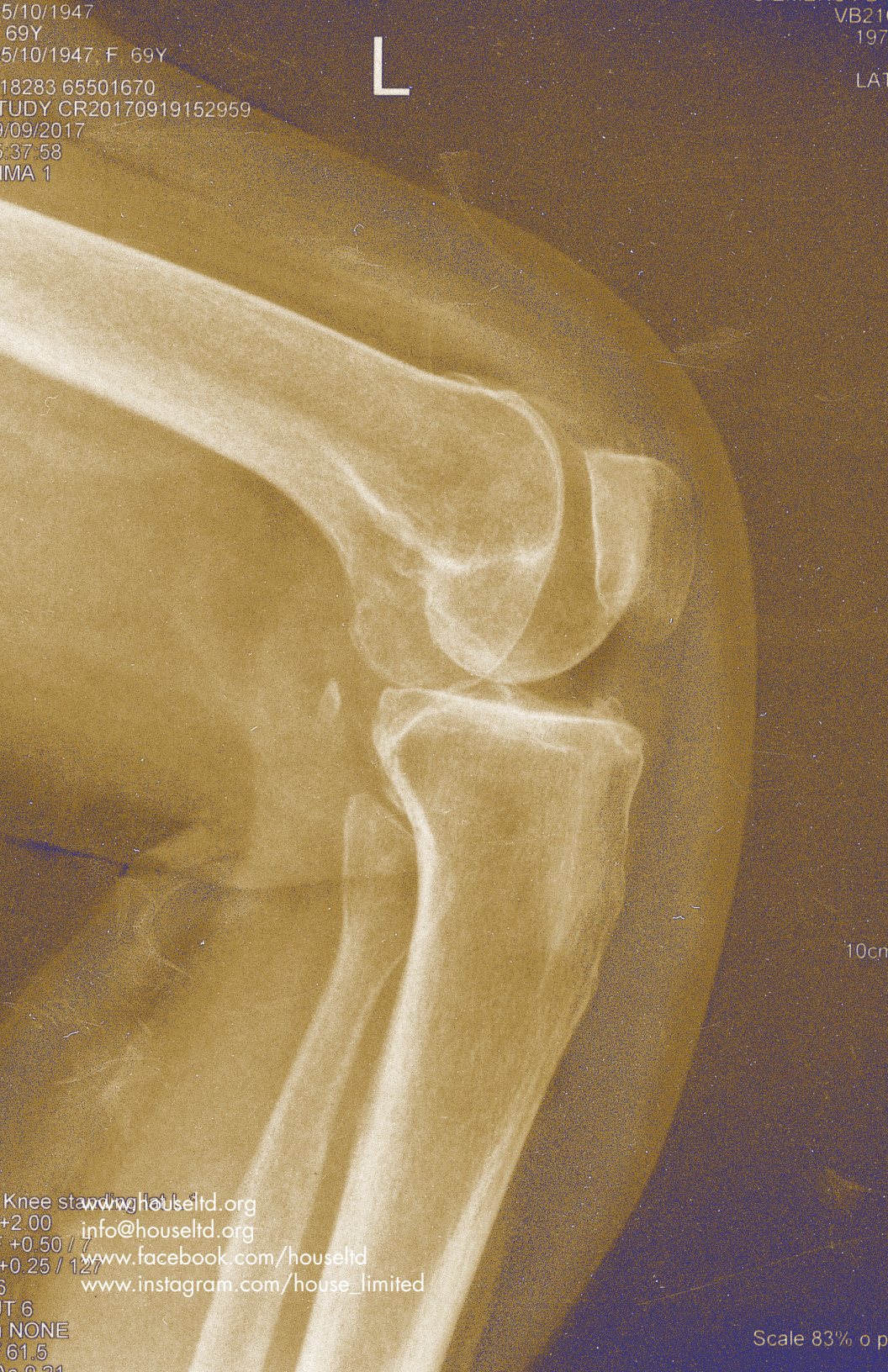
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