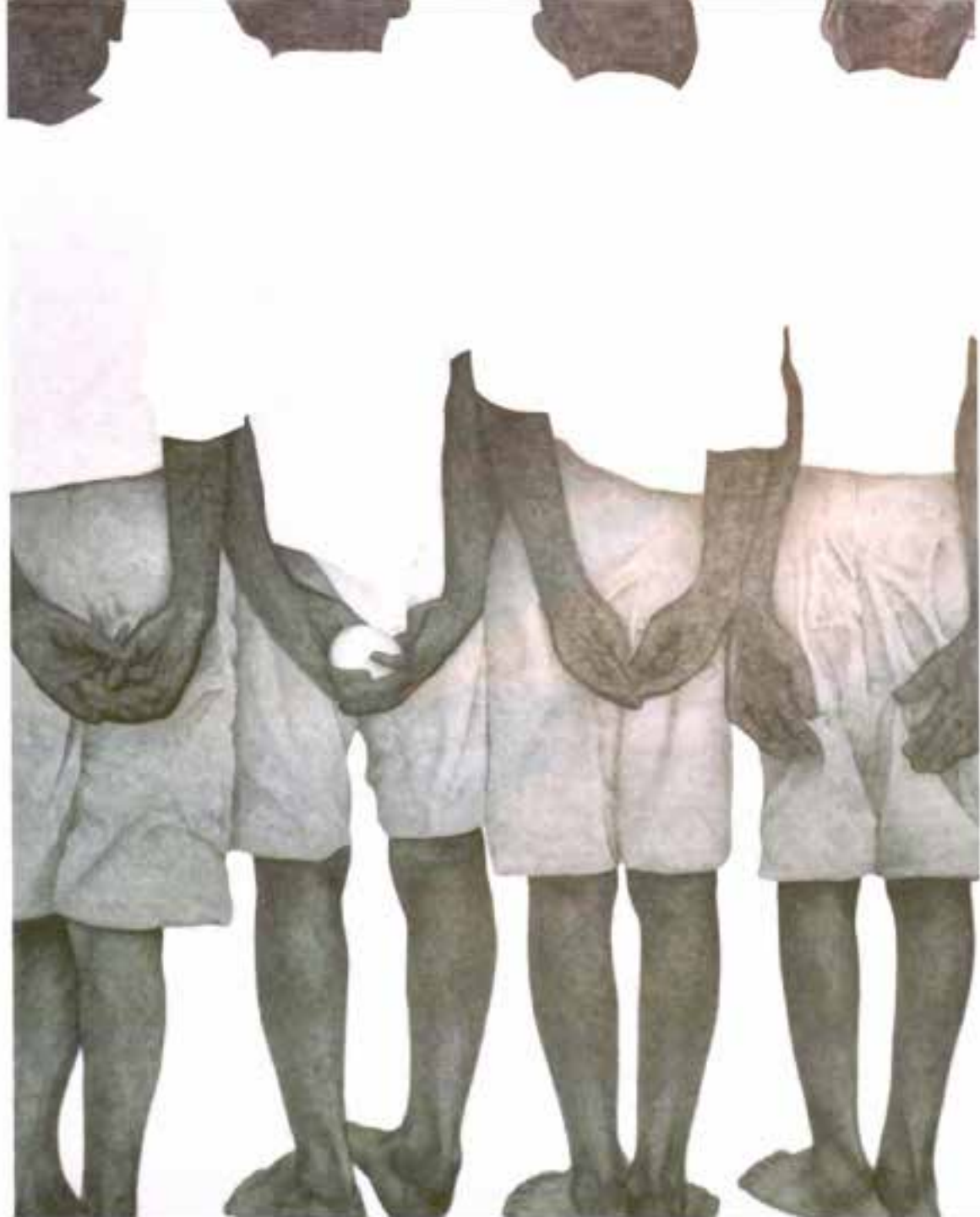




the first  
Karachi **Biennale**

connecting art, the city and its people





# About the Biennale

The Karachi Biennale (KB) is a visionary platform that focuses on innovation, excellence and criticality through curatorial strategies that will bring art from Pakistan and the rest of the world together for a large public audience. Its discursive interventions aim to cross pollinate ideas and explore meaning and truth across disciplines and contexts.

Artists are invited to respond to the theme WITNESS. Art as a testament of its time has always held significance, particularly in times when memory is heavily contested. According to Kundera 'The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memories against forgetting'. The theme Witness has been chosen for its strong relevance to politics of representation, erasure and selective documentation.

The main venue of KB is the 160 year old, NJV School building which is located within the historical precincts of one of the most populous cities of the world. This will give easy access to new audiences and also bring into discussion Karachi's history, which has been often overshadowed by tensions of rapid growth.

Since the 1950s, as Karachi grew from a small harbour town to a mega urban centre, it has attracted independent thinkers. Unburdened by an established canon, it embraced artists who wanted to respond to the personal and the political with greater freedom. Karachi has been home to many influential Modernists and Contemporary artists; its gallery circuit is unrivalled in the country, and one of the most vibrant in South Asia.

With an architecture of exhibitions, discursive interventions and extensive visitor programs during the Karachi Biennale, Art in Karachi will combine creative energies and spark new ones.





## From the KB Trust

With Karachi Biennale (KB), we plan to give a new map of cultural connectivity to the one of the most populous urban centers of the world by creating synergy between Art, the city and its people.

The curated exhibitions will acknowledge the exceptional talent of Pakistani artists that have won global accolades and show it alongside some of the most innovative Contemporary Art from other countries. KB's extensive network throughout the city will make it accessible to new audiences.

The Public Outreach initiatives of KB have begun to take Art deep into the *mohallas*. Its ambitious *Reel on Hai*, the most widespread public Art project in the country ever, has already installed the first few of its 100 transformed cable reels. These reels have been turned into Art works by artists, designers and architects selected through an Open Call.

KB has chosen to locate its principal venue at the 160 year old NJV School, a building that housed the first National Assembly of Pakistan to invite reflection on the city's history that has always embraced diversity and intellectual independence. This site on M A Jinnah Road, the oldest artery, will once again be a link, this time between visitors experiencing art for the first time and seasoned art enthusiasts. To engage them all at multiple levels, an extensive visitor program is planned with artists' talks, keynote speakers and exhibition tours.

The First Karachi Biennale in 2017 is honored to be a part of Pakistan's 70 year celebrations, and introduce its vision, to showcase artistic excellence and create a wider awareness of the transformative energy of Art.

Nilofur Farrukh | Managing Trustee KBT



## From the Curator

### **Witness by Amin Gulgee**

We all bear witness to our times and ourselves, both in the present and the past.

Karachi, where I was born and raised, bore witness to the bloodshed of the partition of the subcontinent into the modern nation states of India and Pakistan in 1947. Despite continuing episodes of turmoil, the city of migrants resiliently grows and thrives. This is especially true in the arts. In 1971, Ali Imam opened the Indus Gallery and it became a focal point for many of our Modernists. Today the gallery scene flourishes and contemporary artists come from all over the country to display their work here. Commercial galleries, however, are not enough. More museums and public spaces to show art are needed in Karachi. It is imperative to establish a Biennale in Pakistan's largest city to engage not only international art audiences but also the people of this diverse metropolis.

It is an honor for me to be selected by the Karachi Biennale Trust as Chief Curator for the first ever Biennale. My curatorial team consists of four dynamic individuals who, like me, not only call this maddening, inspiring city home, but have their own art practices and bring a young perspective and energy to our endeavor.



As curator it has been an experiential venture for me to approach artists from both Pakistan and abroad to bear witness to this perplexing era. This has been an opportunity to learn and absorb very diverse artists' idiosyncratic vocabularies from several continents. Visual artists are not the only ones invited into this discourse; architects, filmmakers, photographers and professionals engaged with fashion and theatre are also included. This cross-disciplinary approach reflects the ethos of Karachi in which there is a great deal of interaction and collaboration among creative communities.

The works commissioned and selected for the Biennale are both political and personal. The issues addressed by artists based whether here or abroad have a resonance for my city. Some are a commentary on the times and others explore the artists' own inner dialogues. They are acts of defiance and celebration that will take viewers to places unexpected and unexplainable. The aim is to ponder not only our times, but also the narratives surrounding them. I do not have answers, only questions.

"There must be something sacred about salt. It is in our tears and in our sea," stated Khalil Gibran. Now, I feel, is the time for us to join together as artists and more importantly as human beings to bear witness to our shared salt.





Now you see me. Artist: Shanzay Subzwari

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Frere Hall. Photo: Danish Khan





Detail of sculpture by  
Zahoorul Akhlaque  
at Maritime Museum, Karachi