

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Project Art Divvy and Rossi & Rossi present:

### **Cultivating Wastelands**

Suleman Aqeel Khilji | Seher Naveed | Zahra Malkani & Shahana Rajani with Abeera Kamran | Mamoona Riaz | Omer Wasim & Saira Sheikh

12–31 July 2018

Private view: Thursday, 12 July, 12–8 p.m.



Omer Wasim & Saira Sheikh, *Studies for a Failed Monument* (detail), 2017

Project Art Divvy and Rossi & Rossi are delighted to present *Cultivating Wastelands*, an exhibition of artworks by Suleman Aqeel Khilji, Seher Naveed, Zahra Malkani & Shahana Rajani with Abeera Kamran, Mamoona Riaz and Omer Wasim & Saira Sheikh.

*Cultivating Wastelands* is the second of a series of collaborative projects held by Project Art Divvy and Rossi & Rossi. This partnership is geared towards extending support and building interest in a new generation of cutting edge artists from Pakistan. We are extremely grateful to the Rangoonwala Foundation for their generous support towards this exhibition and their pledge of support towards the subsequent instalment in the series.

This exhibition brings together the works of artists who are turning their gaze towards the widespread effects of rapid, and often unplanned, industrialization and urbanization. Though their work is grounded in Pakistan, the artists reference global phenomena as land reclamation, indiscriminate development and a disregard for the environment which have transformed our cities and the surrounding landscapes.

Against a social, political and economic backdrop lacking necessary stability, documentation becomes a tool with which artists can drive awareness. Zahra Malkani & Shahana Rajani have created a body of work detailing portions of the construction of the new Jinnah Avenue in Karachi. Their work documents the difficulties faced by the former residential community and the alterations to the surrounding sites by the ceaseless construction. In collaboration with Abeera Kamran, the duo has produced a research-based publication, *Exhausted Geographies*, which maps the city through this new road and other ecological distortions. Omer Wasim & Saira Sheikh examine their present as the past, archiving it in an effort to understand and analyse the rapid modifications. They collect images, data, discoveries of their existent scenarios, gathering and displaying the everyday.

Mapping, too, becomes a tool with which these changes can be tracked but also with which new urban landscapes can be imagined. Mamoona Riaz explores the cities within which she lives and travels, breaking them down into the basic grid lines and structures of maps and architectural drawings which are then built upon layer by layer. These intricate portrayals of the city provides a birds-eye view that incorporates also Riaz' memories of these different locales. Suleman Aqeel Khilji's works similarly exist in the plane between reality and imagination, as influenced by his feelings of dislocation, he creates drawings and paintings depicting archival-like urban and pastoral imagery, jarringly interrupted by brightly painted floating objects reminiscent of plastic debris.

Rapid development and modernisation, alongside rural-to-urban migration has altered the geographical and social perimeters of the city, physically altering their landscapes but also transforming the identities of the people who

live in them. Intrigued by the barricades separating neighbourhoods and communities, Seher Naveed's most recent body of work revolves around security gates. These barriers have become monuments of their own, reflective of cities and communities wary of the differences between their residents.

*Cultivating Wastelands* highlights the irreversible detriment of human intrusions, while simultaneously showcasing the sporadic beauty of man's interventions.

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**Suleman Aqeel Khilji** (b. 1985) lives and works in Lahore. Khilji was selected for a student exchange program to Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris (2009). He received his BFA from National College of Art, Lahore (2011). Selected artist residencies include Vasl Single Artist Residency (2016), Murree Museums Artist Residency (2016). Solo exhibitions include: See View at IVS Gallery, Karachi, Landswept; Inayat and Others. Sanat Gallery, Karachi. Selected international exhibitions include: Pahore, Ecole de Beaux Art. Paris, Second Glance/Double Take, SOAS, London. He recently exhibited at Fakir Khana Museum, as part of Foundation Art Divvy's exhibition, *I, too, am a part of this history*, a collateral to LB01, the Lahore Biennale (2018). Khilji's works are part of prestigious collections such as DIL Foundation New York, Shahrukh Khan's Art Collection, and Luciano Benetton Collection.

**Mamoona Riaz** (b. 1987) lives and works in Islamabad. She received her BFA from National College of Arts (2011). Riaz is an interdisciplinary artist, art editor and curator. She is currently a Lecturer teaching Miniature Painting at her alma mater. She has exhibited at prestigious local and international art galleries and residencies, including Sanat Residency and recently exhibited at Fakir Khana Museum, as part of Foundation Art Divvy's exhibition, *I, too, am a part of this history*, a collateral to LB01, the Lahore Biennale (2018). Riaz is the Art Editor for Paper Cuts, the biannual magazine by Desi Writers Lounge which is an internationally acclaimed venture run by a team of highly efficient writers, authors and artists from South Asia. She was part of the team of Foundation Art Divvy for the landmark exhibition by Imran Qureshi and Aisha Khalid at PNCA, and worked as the Assistant Curator at Satrang Gallery, Islamabad.

**Seher Naveed** (b. 1984) lives and works in Karachi, Pakistan. She was awarded a BFA from the Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture in 2007 and an MA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design in London in 2009. She has shown in various local and international exhibitions and is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Fine Art at the Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture. She also initiated an ongoing research project called "Drawing Documents" that looks at various drawing practices as research.

**Zahra Malkani** (b. 1986) & **Shahana Rajani** (b. 1987) are an artist duo based in Karachi, Pakistan exploring the politics of infrastructure and development in the rapidly transforming city. Malkani and Rajani are also co-founders of the Karachi LaJamia, an anti-institution seeking to politicise art education and explore new radical pedagogies and art practices.

**Abeera Kamran** (b. 1987) is a visual designer and a web-developer based in Birmingham and Karachi. Her creative practice is research-based and lies at the intersections of design, archiving practices and the internet. In collaboration with Zahra Malkani and Shahana Rajani, she designs and publishes *Exhausted Geographies*, a publication which critically engages with the politics of representation and map-making. She co-curated an exhibition in November 2017 at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery called *The Past is Now: Birmingham and The British Empire* which interrogates Birmingham's relationship with the British Empire and attempts to decolonise some of the museum's colonial collection.

**Omer Wasim** (1988) & **Saira Sheikh** (1975 - 2017) are visual artists who practice together, and cast a retrospective glance at the present to radically examine and mine contemporary art practices, and recent, albeit superficial, interest of the global west in their region; and also to reconfigure, re-articulate, and disrupt existing and complacent modes of artistic engagement and production. Wasim continues to execute projects that were jointly conceived and the duo was invited to participate in the Dhaka Art Summit 2018. Omer Wasim has a BFA in Interdisciplinary Sculpture and an MA in Critical Studies from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), Baltimore, Maryland. He has been teaching and practicing in Pakistan, since 2014, and is currently a faculty in the Liberal Arts Programme at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. Saira Sheikh had a BFA from the National College of Arts (NCA), Lahore, Punjab, and an EdM from Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, New York. She had been teaching and practicing in Karachi, Pakistan, since 2013, and was Associate Professor and Head of the Liberal Arts Programme at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi.

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**Art Divvy** was established as a platform to present and showcase contemporary art from Pakistan, both within the country and internationally, with a particular spotlight on emerging artists. Through its two arms, Project Art Divvy and Foundation Art Divvy, it is a venture that highlights the unique stories of the extraordinary artists with whom we have worked and continue to build relationships. We are committed to supporting art projects and focussing on arts education in order to foster a greater appreciation of the arts and artisans of Pakistan.

**Rossi & Rossi** was established in 1986 in London by Anna Maria Rossi, who was later joined by her son, Fabio. Operating from Hong Kong and London, the gallery today is amongst the leading representatives of contemporary artists from the Asia-Pacific region. From remote areas of Kazakhstan and Cambodia to the urban epicentres of Hong Kong and Singapore, Rossi & Rossi's artists produce work as diverse as their countries of origin. Yet they remain engaged in the exploration of the visual language of art that comments upon our world and the artist, the individual and wider society.