Research in Arts and Education, June 2021 Issue on The Creative Process: Critical Perspectives on Art, Research, and Education from Pakistan and Beyond.

Abdullah Qureshi and Natasha Malik

This issue of the Research in Arts and Education, titled The Creative Process: Critical Perspectives on Art, Research, and Education from Pakistan and Beyond, examines and investigates radical feminist and queer approaches to contemporary art, art education, and artistic research methodologies and practices. With a focus on practices from Pakistan, this collection of essays and papers address a range of subjects that compel us to engage with art making, art history, art and activist organization, and research strategies from decolonial and people of colour positionalities.

Farazeh Syed’s contribution, Feminizing and Sexualizing the Orient as the Mysterious Other in Nineteenth Century Orientalist Art, presents an in-depth analysis on the creation of cultural and artistic identities in the context of colonisation and Orientalism with a focus on 19th Century Art. In her paper, she links the orientalist depiction of the female, Muslim body, to the female body as seen in western art. Thinking this through the concept of Othering, Syed examines how artists depicted the nude female body within European art as a passive subject of the male gaze, having no desire or identity of their own, as mere objects for male pleasure. Approaching the field as an artist, Syed connects this study on Orientalist depictions of female bodies to her own artistic practice, through which she attempts to break away from the normative imagery of the female form.
I am, A Spectacle: Reclaiming Female Consciousness through Performance Art in Pakistan, by Natasha Jozi, examines the engagement of women artists with performance art in the last decade in Pakistan. Through curatorial projects organized by House Limited, a performance art initiative founded by Jozi, in this paper, she addresses the complex relationship of the gendered performing body within public space. She articulates the multi-layered process of mediation the mind and body undergo, negotiating with conflicts and vulnerabilities, or rather the natural state of being, to becoming the primary medium of expression, amidst hostile and alienating environments.

Playing Slow, by Madiha Sikander and Candice Okada, is a contemplative visual essay on the writers’ feminist collaborative practice which uses various traditional techniques, including weaving, embroidery, and macrame. By using these feminine techniques, they wish to bring attention to material, labour and duration. In their shared labour of making, time is experienced through slowness and repetition. Making and thinking are closely intertwined. The process of creation is both of tedium and pleasure, grounding the makers in the present.

Walking inCommon is a beautiful and poetic audio essay (and on-going research project) by Naiza Khan that takes a collaborative approach to bring visual practitioners, scholars, and activists in conversation with each other. In particular, she is interested in ideas of performative, embodied mapping that address a range of topics, including questions of power, dislocations, cities, and bodies, amongst others. Her contribution in this special issue takes us on a walk through nature, providing an introduction to her thinking, and making connections across uneven geographies.

In his paper, Max Ryynänen asks: Is most Marxist art (and activism) actually socially democratic? And if so, what should art (and design) universities do about it? Examining these central questions, Ryynänen critically opens up a philosophical and theoretical discourse that provides the potential to re-think the framing of contemporary art practices that are rooted at
the intersection of art, activism, and social justice.

And last, but not least, how will you begin? - a conversation between the founder of Queering Space (who intentionally remains unnamed) and Nora Laraki, QS’s producer - opens up a powerful dialogue on the urgency of creating and building space(s) for communities through collaborative and collective frameworks. Set in the aftermath of the renewed focus Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 and the challenges faced by the on-going COVID-19, the visual essay addresses questions of artistic organization, and their potential to bring about radical social change.