



WARDHA SHABBIR
IN A FREE STATE

**Grosvenor
Gallery**

WARDHA SHABBIR
IN A FREE STATE

27 September - 18 October 2019

In association with Canvas Gallery, Karachi

CANVAS

GALLERY

HERE AND THERE

As there are innumerable birds, there are uncountable leaves. Nameless, feeble, fragile, often forgotten entities, which occupy our surroundings, but hardly stick to one place. Birds fly in the vast sky, sail to their nests at the end of the day. Leaves flutter and once fallen swept away with the wind to different soils and distant grounds. Both birds and leaves, hardly noticed, yet stand for the change: of location, direction, seasons.

E. H. Gobmrich mentions in *Topics of Our Time*, two Chinese sages, standing on a bridge across the river. One observed: "*How cheerfully the nimble fish are jumping and flitting about. This is the joy of fish.*" Other said: "*You are not a fish, how, then, can you know of the joy of the fish?*" The first replied: "*You are not I, how can you know that I do not know of the joy of the fish?*" In the same lieu, I am not a bird, leaf, or even Wardha Shabbir, yet I could sense that the choice of birds and the preference for foliage are not purely – or merely formal decisions. These have a symbolic relevance.

God created this universe, and human beings made symbols out of its components. Everything around us, in our front, far, or past serves us to be a sign for something else. Thus, the tiny segments in Shabbir's art – spread on the surface, covering layers, moving to the edge of the paper, or contained inside minimal forms, are like millions of us who inhabit cities, reside in crowded neighbourhoods, stuck at work places or stuffed in flats.

The imagery of Shabbir is about a space that is fluid, sky that is temporary. A character in V. S. Naipaul's novel (*In A Free State*) describes the experience of his virgin flight "*The plane started, rose up in the air, and Bombay and the ocean tilted this way and that.*" Likewise, the space demarcated in Shabbir's works reverberates maps of the mind. Occasionally these spaces are marked specifically, for instance path from her hotel to the Gallery in London, thus she quenches a cold, difficult and foreign land into a domain that is familiar, personal and private.

Not only the cartography of London streets, but the lines, and rectangular shapes denote a basic instinct. Of combining *nature* with *culture*. Leaves sprout on top of vertical bands, next to the boundary of a geometrical shape; or filled within small rods and an

arching shaft, all fabricated in resin. This act of imbuing two sides of our existence somehow resurrects the contrast (in a contract) of constrained and free, composed and spontaneous, rational and emotional.

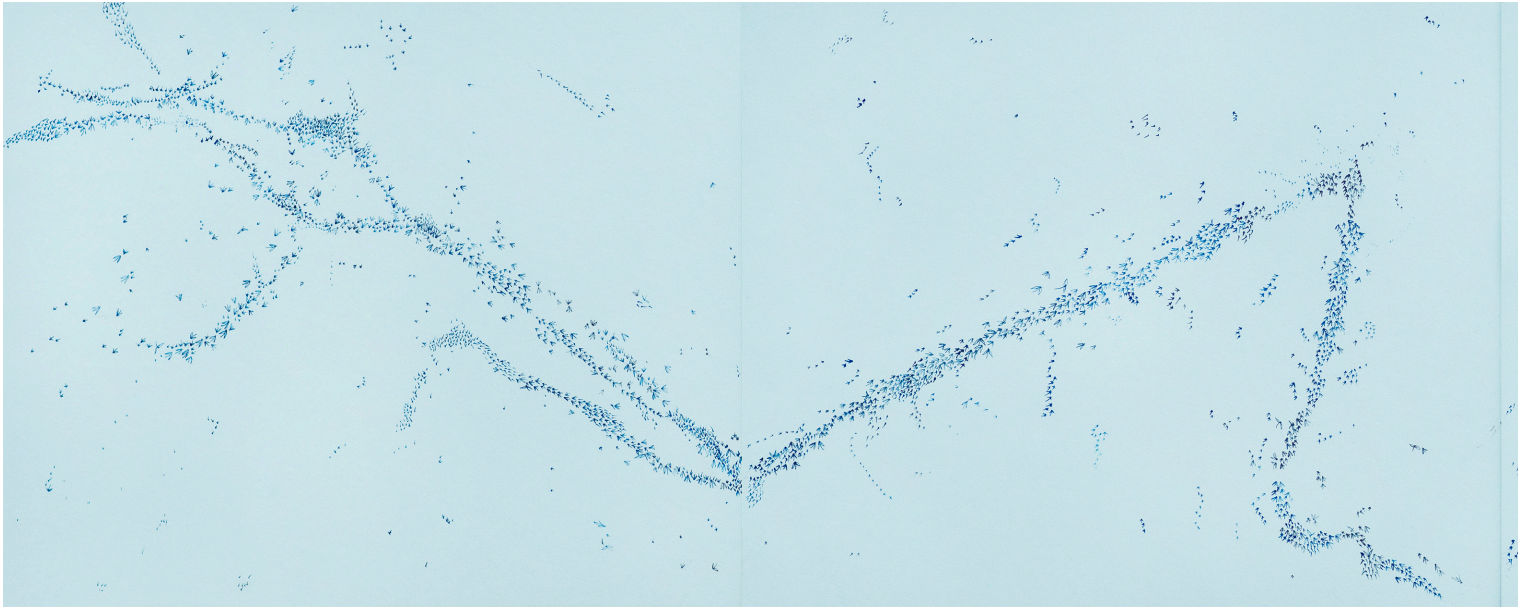
Garden, the main motif in her art, is not merely a place for pleasure, but delineates a complex reading of human society. It lies between the realm of God and the field of mankind. God generated the vastness of nature, ever expanding and growing; and mankind forged tools (axe, saw, shear, cutter, clipper, etc.) for amending and modifying it to his/her own vision, requirement and taste.

Artists came with another set of tools: brush, chisel, hammer, pencil etc. Employing a fine brush and casting methods, Wardha Shabbir builds a bond between nature and nurture; order and chaos, clarity and ambiguity. In her paintings, meticulously made layers of leaves in sensitive greens and sensuous cerulean blues are formed in shredded sections or converging into a circular body. Perhaps a flower. Yet these demonstrate the state of a fragmented world. May that be of traditional aesthetics (Indian miniature painting), social (political) structure, or environmental disruption.

Amid questions of past, present, belonging, and discovery, Shabbir's work survives on a perfect plane. Of doubt. One is not sure, if in some of her works circling segments are disintegrating or being joined. Scattered sections are broken or converging to make the whole. This uncertainty is an essential aspect of her aesthetics in which watching the flights of birds, from her fifth-floor apartment in Lahore, she produces lineage of that sojourn, keeping us speculate on the destination of those creatures.

Destination translates into destiny; as she suspends a viewer in mid-air, between past and present, culture and nature, green and grey – here and there.

Quddus Mirza, 2019



1. *A Lifecycle*, 2019

Gouache on paper, four panels

Total: 21 x 84 cm (8 1/4 x 33 1/8 in)



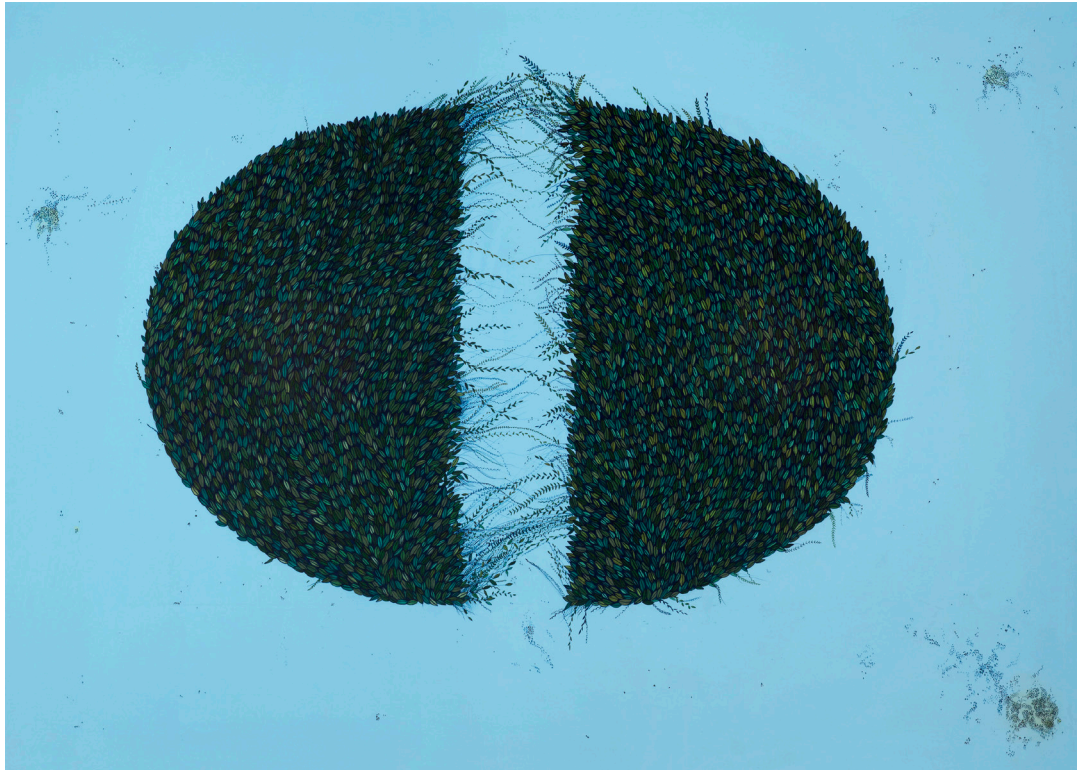
"Taking forward the technique learnt during my years of practicing Miniature Painting, influenced by gardens from my surroundings and the ones depicted in historic manuscripts, the linear organic compositions in my paintings respond to my contemporary concern as an artist: to invoke a thought-provoking process of demystification."

2. A Reference Point, 2019

Gouache on paper

85 x 50 cm (33 1/2 x 19 3/4 in)





3. *In a Free State*, 2019

Gouache on paper

67 x 97 cm (26 3/8 x 38 1/4 in)

4. *Between States*, 2019

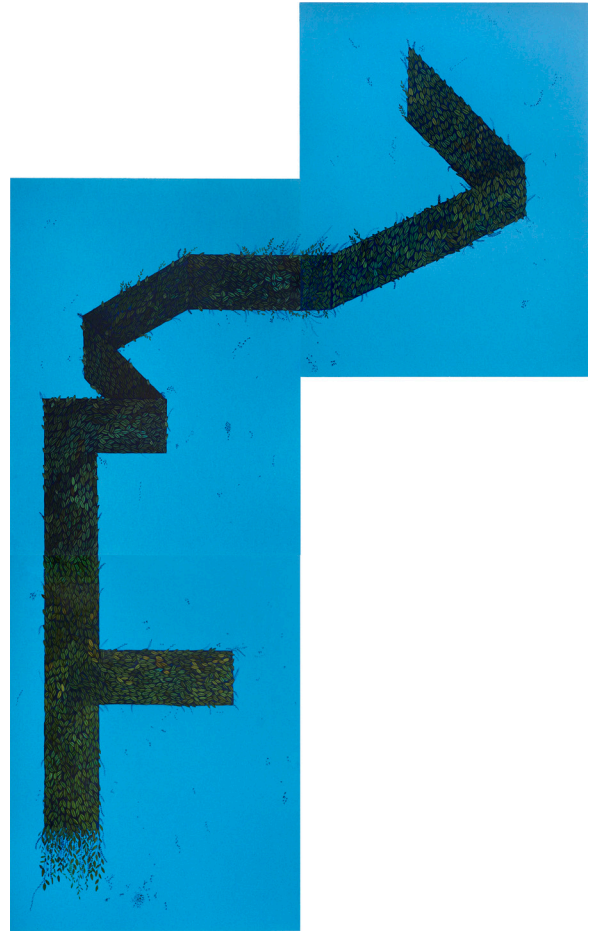
Gouache on paper

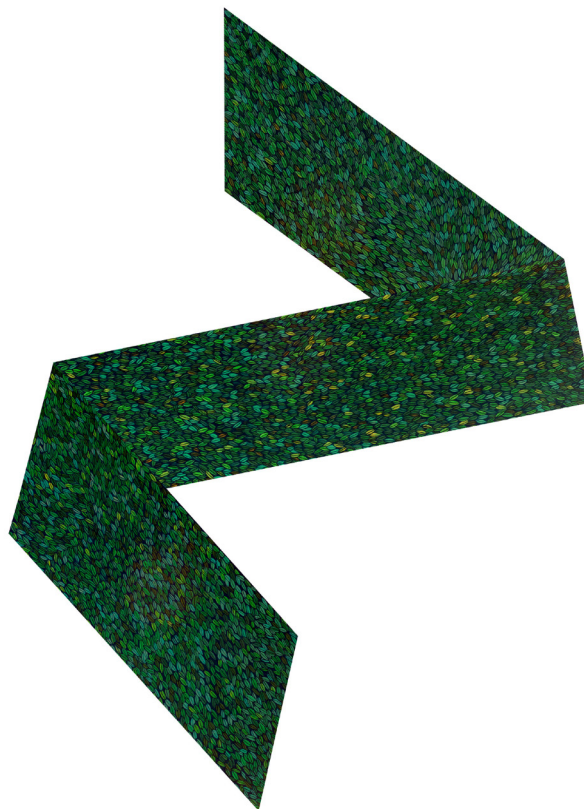
97 x 67 cm (38 1/4 x 26 3/8 in)



5. *Map of Mind*, 2019

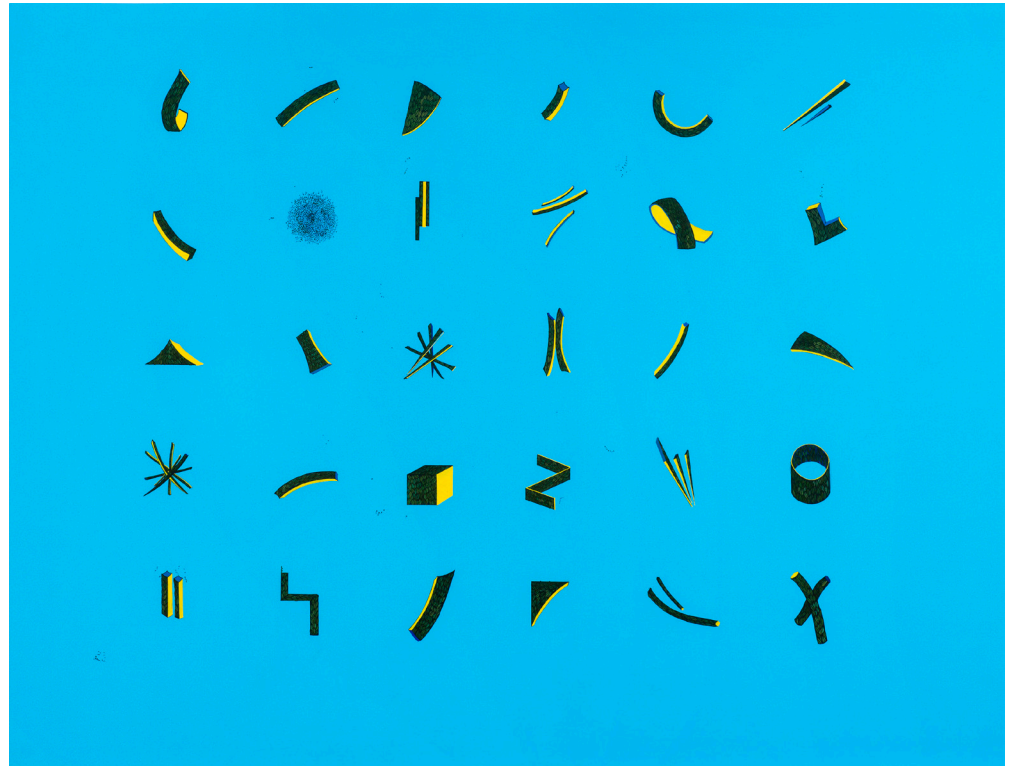
Gouache on paper, triptych
70 x 43 cm (27 1/2 x 16 7/8 in)





6. *The Path*, 2019

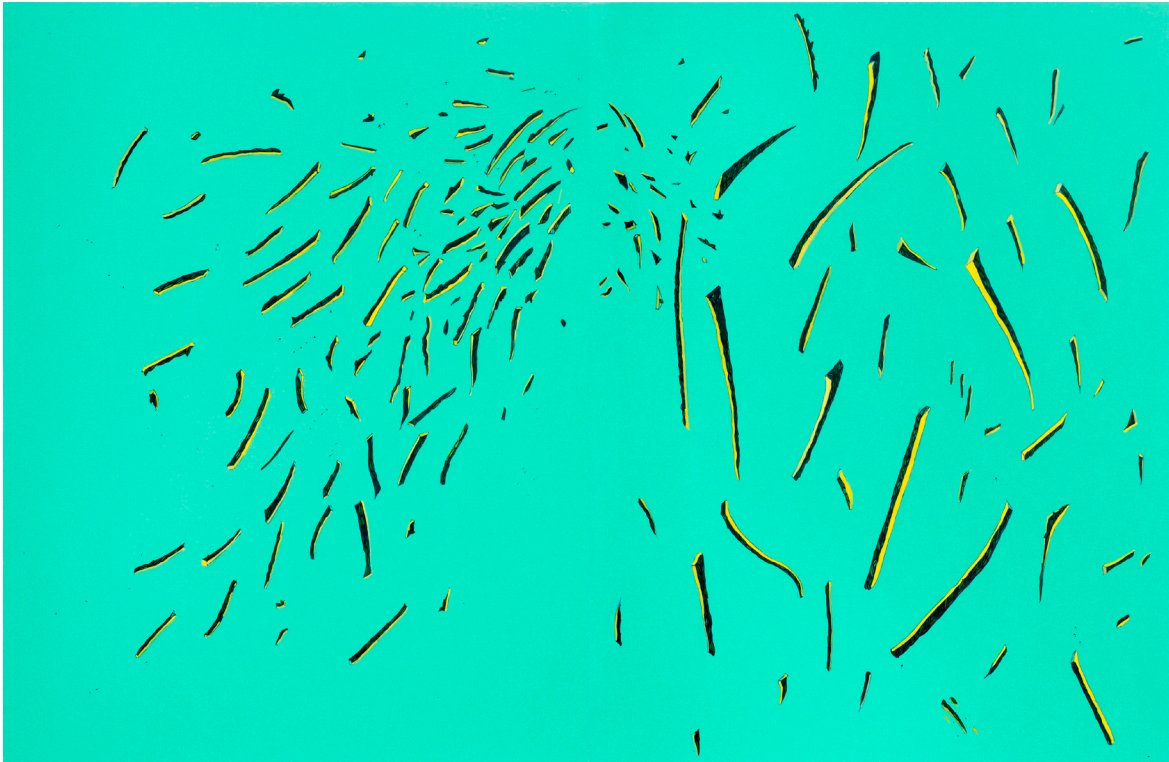
Gouache on paper, triptych
75 x 65 cm (29 1/2 x 25 5/8 in)



7. *A Manuscript*, 2019

Gouache on paper

67 x 89 cm (26 3/8 x 35 1/8 in)



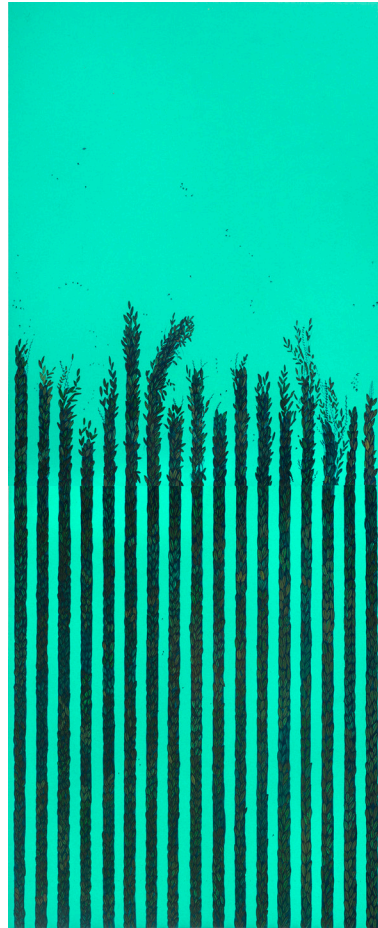
8. *Coming Together*, 2019

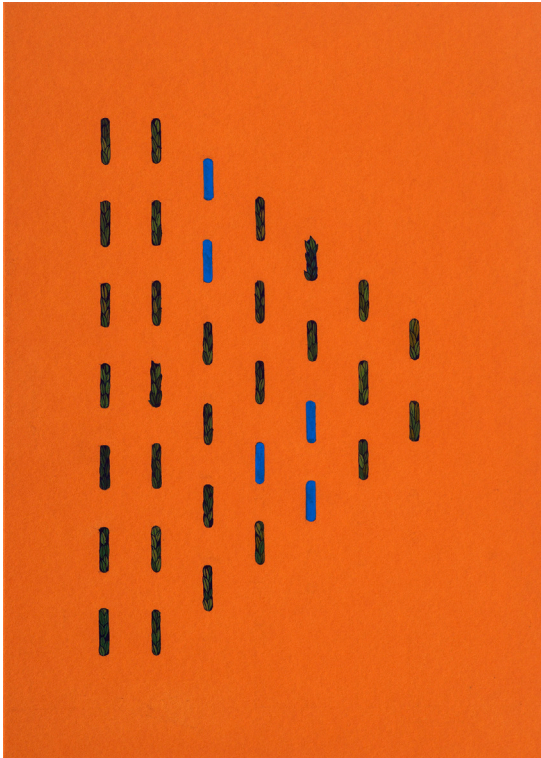
Gouache on paper

28.1 x 43.5 cm (11 1/8 x 17 1/8 in)

9. A Basic Instinct, 2019

Gouache on paper, diptych
55.5 x 21.5 cm (21 7/8 x 8 1/2 in)

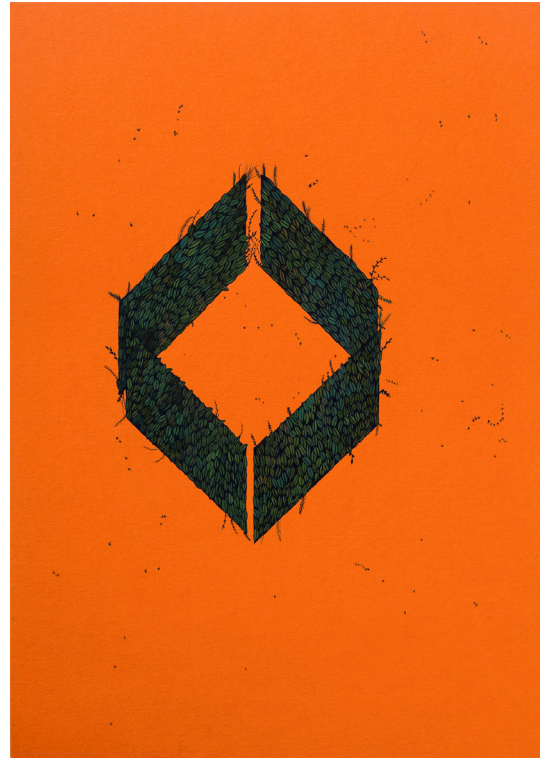




10. *Negative Space*, 2019

Gouache on paper

29.7 x 21 cm (11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in)



11. *A Deconstruction*, 2019

Gouache on paper

29.7 x 21 cm (11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in)



12. *Of a Genre*, 2019

Gouache on paper

29.7 x 21 cm (11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in)



13. *A Sign*, 2019

Gouache on paper

29.7 x 21 cm (11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in)



14. *A Narrative of Space*, 2019

Leaves, resin and mixed media

50 × 7 × 2 cm (19 3/4 × 2 3/4 × 3/4 in)



15. *A Scripture of Time*, 2019

Leaves, resin and mixed media, in ten parts

Max: 28 x 2.9 cm (11 x 1 1/8 in)



Stemming from my interest in the myriad contradictions that inform human behaviour, the path, or 'Siraat', has come to inform some of my recent work. Following this notion of the path, I take reference from the everyday 'Maps' that we see around us, both the physical markings and the non-physical realm of the mind. We construct maps almost about everything, not just to help us familiarise ourselves with our own space, but also as a medium for marking, such as an incident, the future, and experiences. Various arrangements of foliage form relations with points, lines, and surfaces connect space to formulate the 'organic geometry' in my recent work. Similar to the foliage growing in these motifs, my journey as a Pakistani woman artist signifies abundance of growth.

The elements of my subjective experiences create an interactive imagery that unveils itself gradually to the observer's eye: formulating his/her own 'visual vocabulary.' Having used surrounding spaces as a continuity of my canvas, I have moved on to create new 'spaces' within the paintings themselves,

in form of passages, enclosures and sometimes even light. Abundant use of 'blue' incorporates the element of light, a symbol of spirituality and connecting with the sky, referring to the free state of mind in which we don't have any geographical boundaries.

These leaf-lined Utopian pathways are a means of navigating oneself through the clutter of these possibilities and a course of clarity in the midst of contradictory values and states of being. Religious texts and their interpretations incline towards a fatalistic view regarding human life, however there exists at the same time the concept of choice – choosing right over wrong, eternal bliss over worldly and temporary comfort, self-sacrifice over self-centeredness.

My laborious rendering of countless dots coming together as units to form an idea on surface is based on the 'Nuqta' or dot symbolizing infinity. The dots join to form a line, which becomes a single, self-perpetuating medium of self-realization. The linearity of a path is the basis for a shape that can multiply and form a pattern, implying the path's infinitude. Different configurations of well-trimmed hedges and other motifs represent the state of mind: the barriers that block our development, the path we follow through life, or the destination we aim for.

Wardha Shabbir, 2019

Exhibition History

- 2019** *In A Free State*, Grosvenor Gallery, London
- 2019** Delhi Contemporary Art Week, Gallery Latitude 28, New Delhi
- 2019** Jameel Prize 5 Exhibition, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai
- 2019** *If You Have A Garden In Your Library-I*, AAN Gandhara Art Space, Karachi
- 2019** Indian Art fair, Gallery 1x1, New Delhi
- 2018** Solo Show, Canvas Gallery, Karachi
- 2018** Group Exhibition, Museo Diocesano Carlo Maria Martini, Milan
- 2018** Delhi Contemporary Art Week, Gallery Latitude 28, New Delhi
- 2018** Jameel Prize 5 Exhibition, Porter Gallery, Final Shortlisted, Victoria & Albert Museum, London
- 2018** *Solitude*, Group Exhibition, Curated By Salima Hashmi Koel Gallery, Karachi,
- 2018** *I Too Am, A Part Of History*, Curated by Zahra Khan, Fakeer Khana Museum, Lahore
- 2018** Lahore Biennale Foundation, Public Installation: *Way To Paradise*, Lahore
- 2018** *Multiple Narratives*, Grosvenor Gallery, London
- 2018** Group Show, Gallery Threshold, *10 years Anniversary Show*, New Delhi
- 2017** Finalist among eight Artists for Jameel Prize 5, V&A Museum, London
- 2017** Two Person Show, *Maps Of Skin And Spirit*, Canvas Gallery, Karachi
- 2016** Solo Exhibition, Rohtas -2 Lahore
- 2016** Summer Intensive Program Exhibition, Slade School Of Fine Arts, UCL, UK
- 2016** *Revisiting Beauty*, Group Show, Threshold Gallery, New Delhi
- 2016** *Narcissist Reborn*: Group Show, Sanat Gallery, Karachi
- 2015** *Utopia*, Jan Kossen Contemporary Art Gallery, Group Show, New York
- 2014** *Waxing Lyrical*, Group Show, Chawkandi Art Gallery, Karachi
- 2014** DAS (Dhaka Art Summit), Representation of Miniature Painting
- 2013** Artist in residence at FLACC (workplace for contemporary artists), Belgium
- 2013** FLACC Artist's Residency and Show, Genk, Belgium
- 2013** Open studio artist (in research), Gallery Z33, Hasselt, Belgium
- 2012** Art Basel, Switzerland
- 2012** Solo show, Rohtas-II, Lahore
- 2012** Shortlisted among the four international Artists for FLACC (Genk), Belgium
- 2012** Group Exhibition at Indian Art fair, (The Drawing room), New Delhi
- 2011** Group Exhibition at The Drawing Room (CONCH CURVE CREATION), Lahore
- 2011** Group Exhibition at DXB UNFRAMED, Dubai
- 2011** Group Exhibition at Contemporary Istanbul, Turkey
- 2011** Group Exhibition n at JAN KOSSEN ART, Looking through the wider lens, Basel, Switzerland
- 2011** Group Exhibition at The Drawing Room (NOT JUST ANOTHER GROUP SHOW), Lahore
- 2011** Group Exhibition at The Drawing Room, Dubai
- 2011** Group Exhibition at Al-Hamra, Red hot, Lahore
- 2011** *Pakistan - Una Sinfonia De Sonidos y Colores*, Contemporary Pakistan Art, Buenos Aries, Argentina
- 2011** *Emerging Talent*, Group Exhibition, VM Gallery, Karachi

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