



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24

INTERNACIONAL

DECOLONIZING RIZQ: STORIES OF KB24

NAYAB SHAIKH – PAKISTAN,
SPECIAL FOR ART & CRITICISM

ABSTRACT: More than 40 artists from all over the world, converged to explore the theme of Rizq/Risk at the Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24, held in Pakistan's largest city. This theme, which combines the Urdu word Rizq, meaning sustenance and sustenance, juxtaposed with the English word risk, contains layers of meaning. It invites us to reflect on survival, food security and the fragile dance between fortune and danger.

KEYWORDS: Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24, Pakistan. Daniela Zambrano Almidón, colonial powers, resistance.

Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, home to diverse cultures, became the canvas for over 40 artists from across the world. They all converged to explore the theme, Rizq/Risk at the Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24, from October 26 to November 10, 2024. The thematic, that combines the Urdu word Rizq that means livelihood and sustenance with the English word risk, holds layers of meaning. It invites us to reflect on survival, food sovereignty and the fragile dance between fortune and peril. How do we navigate the forces that shape our fates, from the global to the deeply personal?

The Karachi Biennale sprawled across spaces of colonial heritage like Bagh Ibne Qasim, Frere Hall, and NED University with Modern structures like Alliance Francaise Art Gallery and Sambara Art Gallery – transform urban landscape into a stage for art to meet life. The works featured in KB24 offer powerful reflections on the lingering impacts of colonialism, expanding the themes to un-acknowledged women labor, migration, environmental degradation, and cultural identity.

In Daniela Zambrano Almidón's Colonial History of Potatoes, the humble spud, now so familiar in kitchens around the world, becomes a haunting reminder of a stolen history. You feel the weight of its journey from the Andes to the farthest corners of the globe – not through wonder, but through the violence of appropriation. As the potato's legacy unravels, so



too does the erasure of indigenous knowledge, displaced for profit.

In Flesh and Blood, Ayesha Jatoui's use of tactile mediums like flesh, skin, and earthy materials creates an intimate dialogue between the human form and the land. It becomes clear that this is not just an abstract critique, but a tangible representation of colonial violence – where the land was plundered. Steel

Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24

plates, coated in blood-hued liquid and rubble, lined the hallways at Frere Hall – a visceral reminder of the violence absorbed into the city’s foundations. It made me pause. As spectators, do we consume such pain passively, much like colonial powers consumed the labor and resources of the colonized?

The Cooking Oil Project installation by Marlene Hausegger and Hannes Zebedin (Austria) through an evocative installation transforms recycled Palm Oil cans into a visual critique of the exploitation of farmland diverted from a food resource into the extractive agriculture of cash crops. In the process destroying the productivity of the land with mono-culture. The artists by also planting local plants in the installation point to the importance process of healing.

In Monika Emmanuelle Kazi’s A Home Care - Machine Learning, she exposes the subtle and overt ways in which food trade by world powers has shaped not just the food we eat, but the very rituals that surround



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24

it. There is a rawness in the way she brings us into the intimacy of the domestic sphere, where staples like powdered milk and babyfood were introduced under the guise of progress. Many of these inferior goods like milk powder were banned in the countries of origin. These goods weren’t just products; they were impositions, lifelines twisted into

instruments of control, rewriting how generations would nurture themselves.

In Kazi’s hands, the kitchen becomes a battleground, not just of resources, but of identity. A space where the past lingers, uninvited, but where new possibilities for connection, care, and tradition can also rise. The machine might still run, but we are learning to feed



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24

ourselves again – on our own terms. Tino Sehgal uses dance as “food for the soul” to reclaim Sufi spiritual practices suppressed by colonial forces. Through embodied movement, Sehgal channels a resistance that transcends colonial history, invoking a deeply cultural form of nourishment. His performance reasserts the vitality of indigenous knowledge, inviting the audience into an experience where cultural reclamation and spiritual renewal converge.

I stood there, captivated. The performers became vessels of memory, their bodies refusing to be confined by colonial narratives. It was a reminder that decolonization is not just intellectual – it is embodied, lived, and felt. Language is another site where colonial epistemic endures. The imposition of English during British rule relegated indigenous languages like Urdu and Sindhi to the margins, erasing local voices and histories. KB24’s reading sessions, under the pier at Bagh Ibne Qasim park, however, reclaimed these languages, showcasing their resilience through poetry and storytelling.

Feminist poet Attiya Dawood’s autobiography, for instance, captured the defiance of Sindhi women through poetry. Her verses, rich with oral traditions, reminded me of



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24

my grandmother’s stories – narratives that carried the weight of history while offering a glimpse of hope and warmth.

Aquila Ismail, a writer guided discussions bridging



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24

art and societal reactions. The multilingual mushairah transformed KB24 into a sanctuary for poetry, reclaiming identity through the spoken word and that too in the different languages spoken in Pakistan.

Beneath poets and writers confronted themes of displacement, resilience, and forgotten lives. At the pier in Bagh Ibne Qasim, poetry wove a tapestry of shared memory, where perspectives shifted like tides, opening minds to unordinary truths.

The event wasn't confined to traditional boundaries. It gave cameras to children, asking them to capture what "felt like them"

This simple yet powerful gesture reclaimed agency, challenging the gaze that historically framed local narratives. Meanwhile,



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24

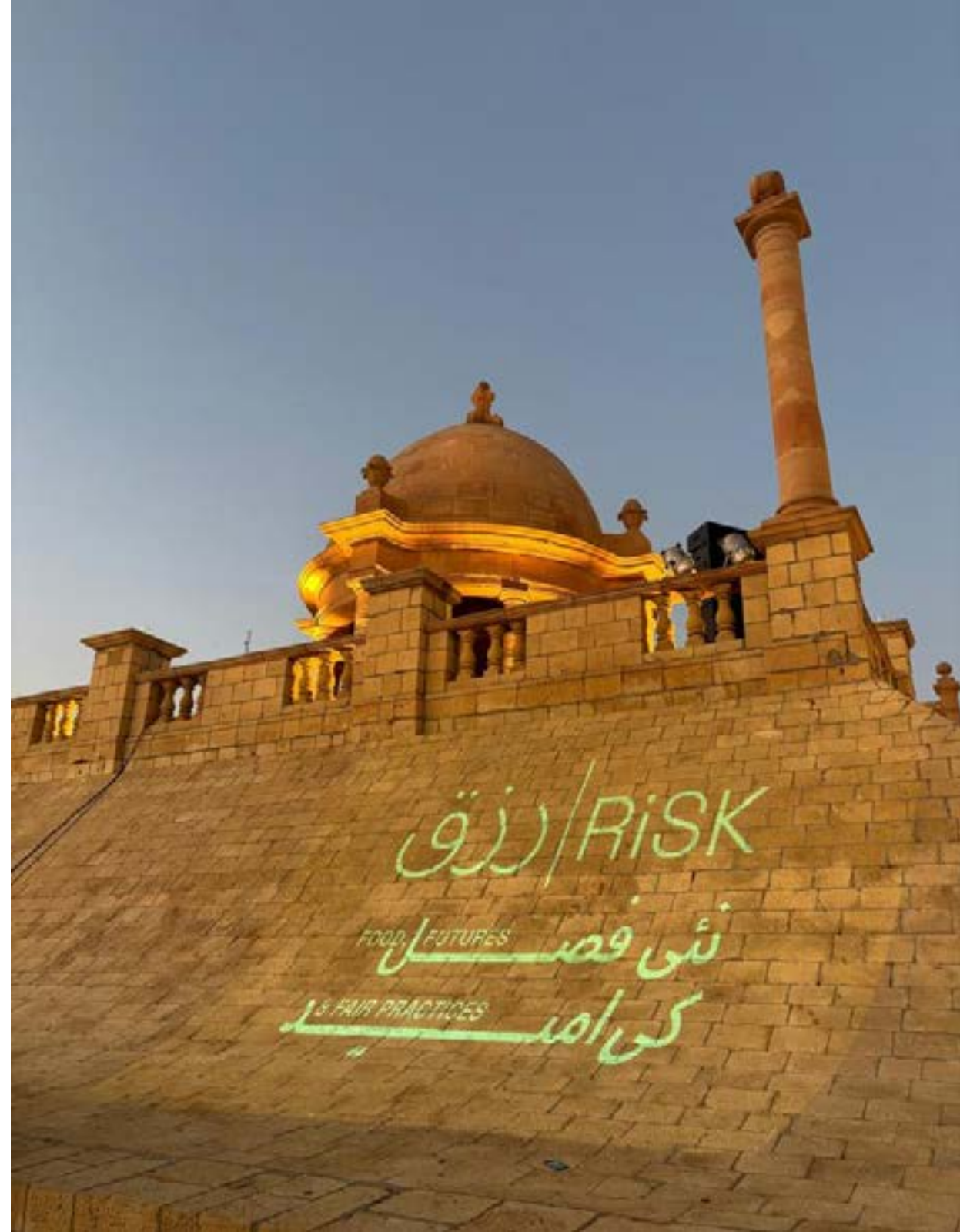
the mushairah transcended art, becoming a living archive of decolonial thought, where global struggles like Palestine echoed through Karachi's streets.

Through the works of student artists, KB24 also honored the indomitable spirit of Gaza, echoing the resilience of those whose struggle continues amid the overwhelming tides

of history. Karachi's Biennale thus stands not just as an exhibition, but as a living dialogue between space, history, and humanity – a reflection of the unpredictability of Rizq, the sustenance of life, in a world defined by Risk.

As I stepped away from KB24, the echoes of poetry and performance

lingered, reminding me that decolonization is not a distant ideal but an urgent, evolving reality. The Biennale invited us to reconceptualize Rizq, not as a commodity born from exploitation, but as a shared right to dignity, abundance, and self-determination. It called for a revolution of thought – where art is not confined to galleries, but is a tool for liberation. Yet, it also posed a critical question: how can we ensure these powerful narratives reach beyond the elite, into the communities they represent? Amidst a world shaped by colonial legacies, the Biennale offered a truth: the power to rewrite history lies in every hand, every voice, and every act of resistance.



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24



Publication Fourth Karachi Biennale KB24

NAYAB SHAIKH

Is an emerging art writer based in Karachi. Through writing and photography, she likes to explore the unspoken sparks of everyday life while allowing self reflection. Her short career includes writing for the prestigious cultural publication The Aleph Review and was a part of the The Blue Orange Project as a writer. Her work has been printed in two anthologies namely Garden of Memories and Euphoria.