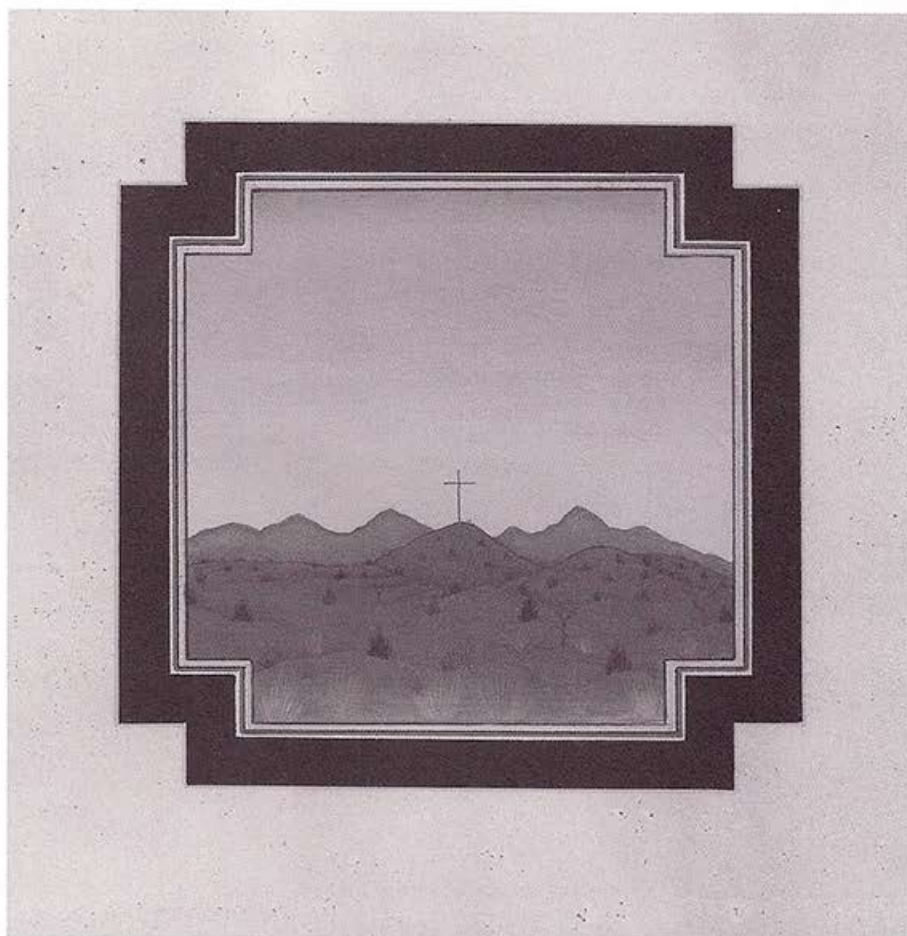


# HAND PAPERMAKING

<p>پاک و دای بد و نه          ابل خب را پر سپند آشکا          روی بنود آفتاب و ابل          جلور از نام ماند زشت          سر کشتند چنان پست          چهرت و دانا مذکی از روی          آتش و دوزخ بید از دنیا و          کم تو اندک دار و غیرت          محرم خلوت که روح آمدی          داغ می نه بر جرات دم نه          زانکه در بر مصلاش نماز          زانکه در مجسمه روح را غیبت          کی توان کرد بی تو خفا          ابل دل از داغ بشناسند          چند و پنک پست این امان          حالتش آمد بد اندر زبان          چون کشتی منت وادی کار          چون منت گئی می سپرد</p>	<p>حال خود کوید تا خود چش          شت خلد از شرم او مار کش          ابل دوزخ در جواب پیش          از قدم تا فرق عسکری شیم          وز چنان وی چنین فادایم          ز آتش و دوزخ کجا مذحبر          در جرات دوزخ راحت          دان که مارا درشت پر کال          درنده و غافل بافتن          کاهی فارغ ز فود و پس چنان          روی چون بنود مارا آشکا          ز آتش شربت دل شاد و          سر که اندر شربت چهرت          که درین سندان تو بخرج آمد</p>	<p>بر علی طوسی که پر عهد بود          گفت فردا ابل دوزخ زانکار          که خوشی جنت و دوزخ وصال          چون حال و باز در یک ش          چون بکونید ابل جنت حال خوش          زانکه اصحاب جانی خوشیم          چون شیم اگر که احاد ایم          سر کجی کن آتش آید کار کر          چهرت و که در جرات است          که تو محرومی دم از عالم ن          از بی در خواست روی بر نیان          خواب و پست روی او اورا          که ز غم کردی جرات روح          داغ دل او که در سید دل          و یکی کشتی که ای دانا          به پید لب لید آتر مان          گفت ما را منت وادی است          و انیاد در جانی ان اکس</p>
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## *Reconciling Tradition and Contemporary Practice in Present-Day Miniature Painting in Pakistan*

MURAD KHAN MUMTAZ

*Murad Khan Mumtaz, Spanish Cross (Pilgrimage Road), 2011, 11 x 8 inches, natural pigments and opaque watercolor on prepared wasli paper.*

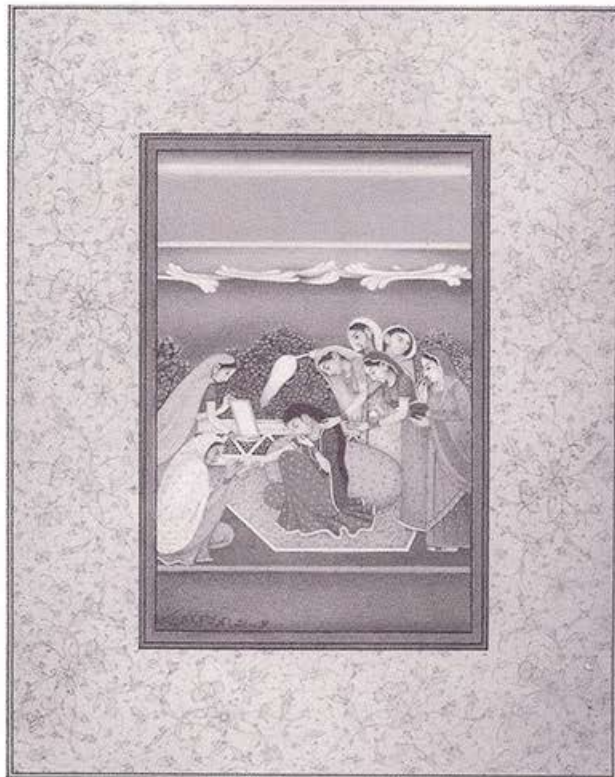
*Courtesy of Tracy Williams, Ltd., New York.*

In the traditional world every artistic vocation aspired toward an ideal. This principle applied across cultures to arts as diverse as poetry, calligraphy, masonry, painting or papermaking. Every object made with this intention also had a utilitarian function within the society. "The artifact, moreover, was there for the whole man, the trichotomous being made up of body, soul, and spirit; and so even the humblest tool or utensil had to possess more than simply 'utility,' in the contemporary sense."<sup>1</sup>

In 2000 I began my formal education at the National College of Arts in Lahore. Almost immediately, I became conscious of the friction between traditional and modern values coexisting within the fabric of a post-colonial institution. My individual experience of studying the tradition of miniature painting within a modern academic environment is just one case study among many. However, the challenges that shaped my formation and subsequent practice continue to raise complex questions that propel my work to this day.

The National College of Arts is the only institution in the world to offer an undergraduate degree in miniature painting. Initially known as the Mayo School of Art, NCA was established by the British in the late nineteenth century. Their goal was to stimulate the production of local crafts for the purpose of international trade.<sup>2</sup> After the partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947, the newly formed state of Pakistan did not support indigenous art and culture, largely because it looked towards the developed West for inspiration. As a direct result of this indifference, the majority of indigenous art traditions gradually disappeared. When the Mayo School was reorganized as NCA in the 1950s, it remodeled itself according to a modern Western paradigm that privileged fine art over "applied" art.





Bashir Ahmad, *Kangra Princess*, 1987, 10 x 7 3/4 inches, gouache on wasli paper. Photo by and courtesy of Marcela Sirhandi.

Miniature painting (locally known as *musawwari*) is one of the few art forms that survived this transition. From NCA's inception until the early 1980s, miniature painting was offered as a minor subject. My teacher, *Ustad*<sup>3</sup> Bashir Ahmad, was the only traditionally trained miniaturist to emerge from the school during this period.<sup>4</sup> His personal history presents a compelling window into a system that no longer exists in Pakistan.

In 1974, *Ustad* Bashir Ahmad began his apprenticeship under *Ustad* Sheikh Shujaullah, a master who came from a family of traditional miniaturists. With his *ustad*'s guidance, Ahmad learned both Pahari and Mughal *musawwari* techniques until Shujaullah's death in 1980. At that time Ahmad succeeded his *ustad* as NCA's miniature instructor. Sensing the need for institutional support for miniature's preservation in a modern context, Ahmad immediately began campaigning for its introduction into the undergraduate curriculum. Despite fierce resistance from within the administration, he finally succeeded, and in 1982 miniature was offered for the first time as a major subject. Within two decades the miniature program had become the most popular in the school, leading to international recognition and a new genre known as "contemporary miniature." It is worth noting that this trajectory of modern miniature practice has followed a path quite distinct both in form and content from the miniature tradition that is being practiced in India today.

For miniaturists in Pakistan, condensing a traditional methodology into a modern academic system has come with a price; integral material and philosophical practices that were once transmitted organically through the *ustad-shagird* (master-disciple) paradigm have been sacrificed. By contrast, miniaturists in India



Bashir Ahmad teaching at the National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan. Photo by and courtesy of Marcela Sirhandi, circa 1985.

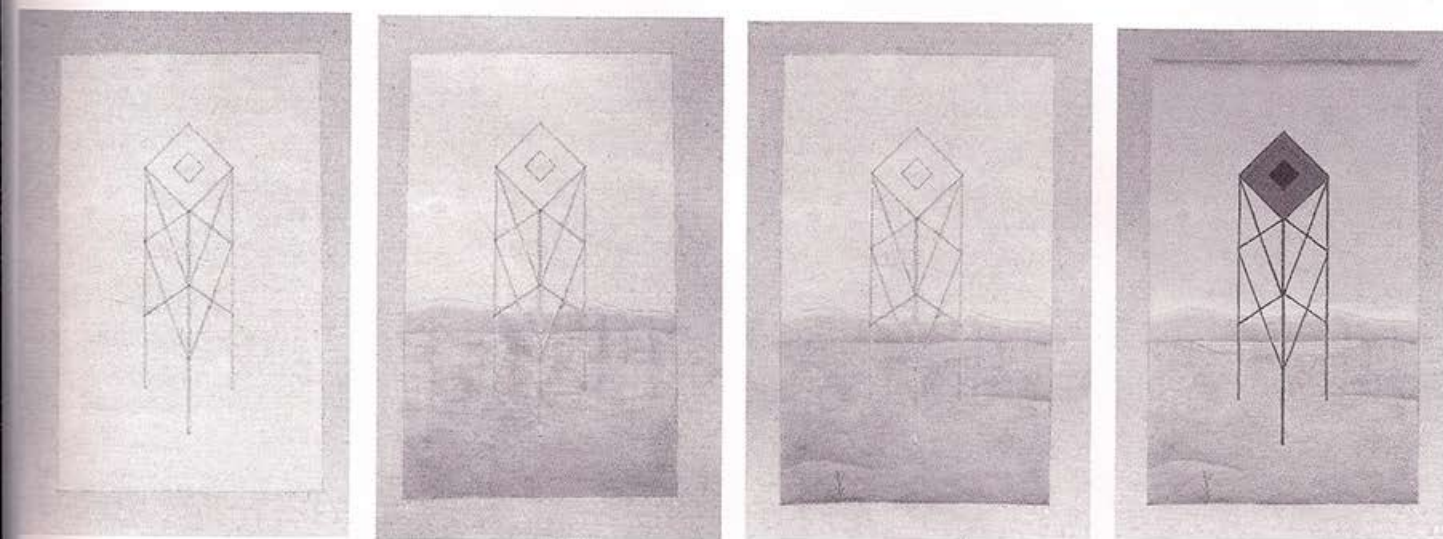
continue to be more rooted in the hereditary, artisanal guild system, despite dwindling patronage.

In an ideal traditional setting the *ustad* was not only a teacher but also a moral, religious, and spiritual guide. Furthermore, in most guilds the act of initiation (*bayah* in Arabic and *bait* in Urdu) was essential in order for a *shagird* to formally enter the guild.<sup>5</sup> Just as in spiritual orders, this act was symbolic of a rebirth and entry into a new family system. Through the rite of initiation the disciple was linked to a chain that could be traced back to the founder of the guild, allowing *barakah*, divine grace, to flow into the work produced.<sup>6</sup>

A *shagird*'s training usually began with basic drawing assignments that developed the hand and eye. These consisted of line practice and copying floral patterns. Simultaneously, the *shagird* assisted the *ustad* in all manner of chores, which ranged from grinding pigments and catching squirrels to make brushes, to cleaning the workshop and giving massages. This first phase of apprenticeship could last from a year to a decade, depending on the capacity of the *shagird*, and was meant to instill a sense of humility. Gradually, the *shagird* advanced to more complex assignments including copying from older masterpieces, or from the *ustad*'s own studies. It is important to remember that the goal of traditional art was not to develop personal style, but instead to aspire toward pre-existing ideals that were often rooted in divine archetypes.

Traditionally, the ruling elite patronized the best artists and consulted with masters directly, often shaping artistic developments. Qualitatively speaking, patrons and artists, and in fact the whole culture, shared common values. The intention behind making an artwork was not to reflect the sensorial world, but rather to





Murad Khan Mumtaz, *Beetle's Tower* (work in progress), 2012, 10 ½ x 6 ½ inches, natural pigments on wasli paper made by Mohammad Hussain Kagzi in Sanganer, India. Courtesy of the artist. [Finished painting on back cover of magazine. Ed.]

depict qualities of the divine through idealized forms.<sup>7</sup> A horse in a traditional miniature painting is not a specific horse, but instead the perfect horse.

The more I learned about the history of this art form, the more I became conscious of the limitations of my own education in a contemporary university environment. For example, even the word *musawwari* has all but fallen out of use in Pakistan, having been eclipsed by the term "miniature painting," which was introduced by the British. Similarly, the once intimate relationship between *ustad* and *shagird* has been replaced by the comparatively detached relationship between teacher and student. Additionally, the intensive apprenticeship that formerly unfolded over decades has been condensed into two to four academic years. On the one hand, the academic format in Pakistan has allowed miniature to subsist; on the other hand, students of the art can only hope to build a superficial understanding of the tradition. Within this new system, miniature is reimagined as a contemporary art form that rewards individual style and mimics the cultural values of the modern West.

Researching the material practices of traditional miniature painting has given me insight into the compromises that have shaped my understanding of miniature. *Ustad* Bashir Ahmad has often remarked that in times like ours, the perpetuation of traditional material knowledge is of far less importance than the production of art. From a practical point of view this makes sense; however, shortcuts inevitably lead to an attenuation of knowledge that erodes the tradition.

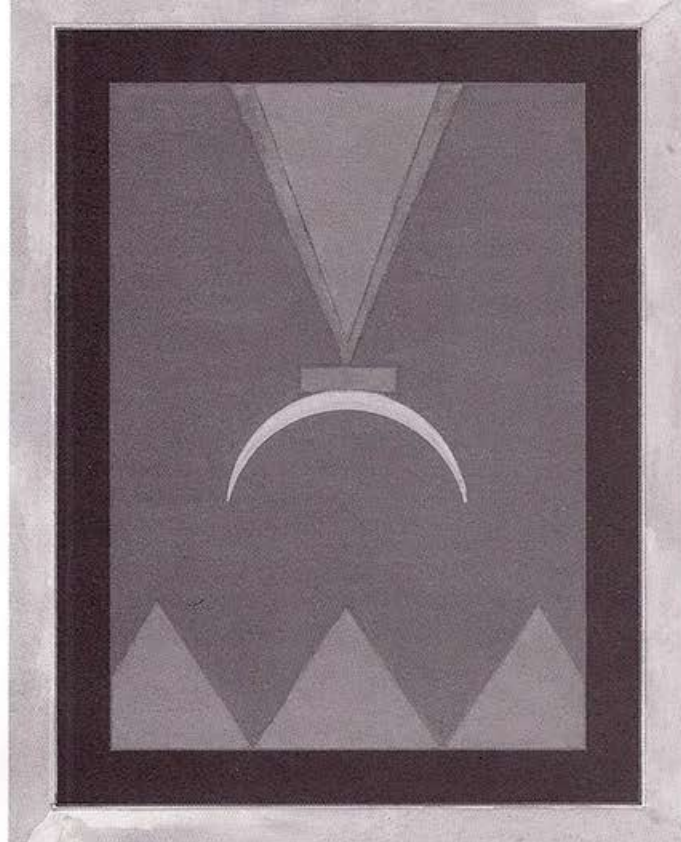
One example of this phenomenon is the disappearance of traditional *wasli* paper in Pakistan. The preferred painting surface for North Indian miniaturists, *wasli* is made by gluing together thin

sheets of handmade paper and burnishing the top layer. The choice of surface is of utmost importance and traditionally miniaturists took great pains to acquire the most refined paper possible. The region of Punjab partitioned to Pakistan was once renowned for papermaking. As late as the nineteenth century, Lahore was home to the *mohalla-e-kaghaziyan*, or paper district. Another city in Punjab, Sialkot, produced an exquisite paper that has since passed into legend thanks to the introduction of cheap industrial paper imported from Europe.

The technique for preparing *wasli* paper that Ahmad introduced at NCA is at least partially rooted in tradition. The old method of preparing and applying the flour-based glue, called *laee*, is still used at NCA. However, students now have no choice but to produce *wasli* using heavily bleached and acidic drawing paper that usually starts yellowing within a year. The only advantageous quality of the paper is an industrial smoothness that allows for extremely refined line work. However, the unnaturally thick and rigid quality of *wasli* favored at NCA encourages students to apply thick coats of color and to explore other "experimental" techniques alien to traditional miniature painting.

Knowledge of pigments has followed a similar course of departure from tradition. Apart from zinc white, *safaida*, which continues to be used as the vehicle of opacity for all pigments, students rely on imported, industrial watercolors. Their growing lack of exposure to traditional material preparation has led to a marked indifference toward craft. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why it has been inevitable for NCA miniaturists to break away from traditional models. The fact that patronage has shifted into the sphere of contemporary art has also contributed to this transformation.

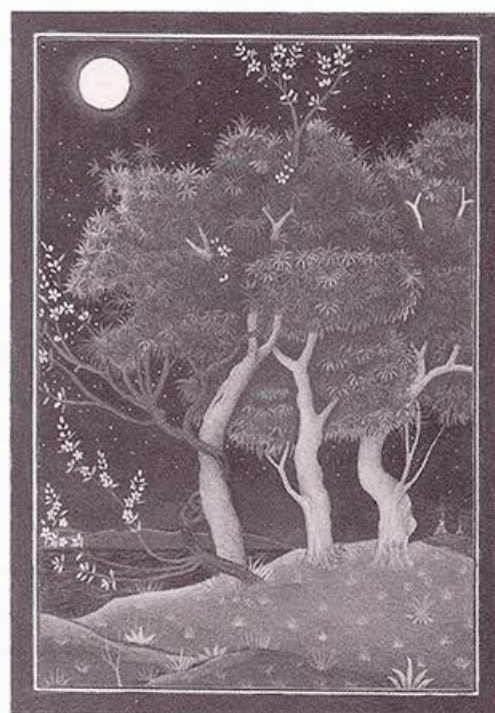




Murad Khan Mumtaz, *Revelation*, 2011, 11 x 8 inches, natural pigments and opaque watercolor on prepared wasli paper. Courtesy of Tracy Williams, Ltd., New York.

Recently, for the first time, I had the opportunity to work on traditional handmade *wasli* paper produced by one of the last great papermaking families in India. Coming into contact with their craftsmanship gave me new insight into the particularities of a material that was developed and perfected in concert with the art form itself. The thin and delicate quality of this paper required me to work differently than I have in the past when using modern *wasli*. Although it was easier to achieve flat washes of color, an integral technique for the art form, it was also necessary to paint in thin coats, developing the surface in layers. As a result, the paint layer was noticeably more integrated with the paper itself. This marriage of materials enhances the two dimensionality of the painting, demanding a more symbolic and flattened visual vocabulary that resists naturalism. By contrast, modern *wasli* paper made from industrial sheets has no character of its own and the machined smoothness of the surface makes it easy for the painter to get overly absorbed in excessive layering and rendering. It is not surprising that this material possibility has contributed to a growing fascination with photorealism and illusionism among contemporary miniaturists.

The future of miniature painting in Pakistan depends on its practitioners' willingness to reestablish meaningful links with the art form's rich history in the region. It is critical that miniaturists invest more energy in preserving traditional methods integral to the practice, rather than indifferently allowing them to disappear. Despite its non-traditional structure, NCA is well positioned to be the modern repository for a precious knowledge base. Not only does it benefit from the presence of one of the last *ustads* in the country,



Murad Khan Mumtaz, *Ghost Nation III*, 2010, 6 ½ x 4 ¾ inches, opaque watercolor on prepared wasli paper. Courtesy of the artist.

it is also located in the heart of colonial-period Lahore, in close proximity to one of the country's best painting collections and the parallel world of the walled city, where traditional material knowledge is to varying degrees preserved. Lending more importance to the local context by students and teachers alike will restore honor and integrity to the contemporary practice of miniature painting.

#### NOTES

1. Wolfgang Smith, "Progress in Retrospect," in *The Betrayal of Tradition: Essays on the Spiritual Crisis of Modernity*, edited by Harry Oldmeadow (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc. 2005), 260.
2. "Official" Chronicle of Mayo School of Art. Formative years under J. L. Kipling (1874–94), researched and introduced by Nadeem Omar Tarar, edited by Samina Choonara (Lahore: National College of Arts, 2003).
3. *Ustad* is the traditional name for master or teacher.
4. Rukhsana David, "Contemporary Miniature Painting in Lahore 1980–2007," PhD dissertation, Lahore College for Women University, 2009.
5. Sir George C. M. Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd, 1884), 137–140.
6. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *Teaching of Drawing in Ceylon* (Sri Lanka: Colombo Apothecaries Co., Ltd., 1906).
7. For a more detailed understanding of the traditional painting atelier see *Abul Fazl, Ain-e-Akbari*, translated from the original Persian by Francis Gladwin (Nabu Press, 2012.)



