



Sumaya Durrani, 2022, My Assassination at NAG. Transmedial work on canvas 9ft x 5ft.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'My Assassination at NAG' (National Art Gallery Islamabad), constitutes a series of transmedial interventions and performance works executed between 2019 - 2022, building on my July 19th, 2019, Letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan and the President of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi, which sought action against the destruction of my artworks, entitled Shahkaar - Rukh e Mustafa - Noor e Mohammadi, Kun, and Tajalli at the National Art Gallery Islamabad. These works were executed between 2013 - 2014 as part of the permanent National Collection at the NAG, constituting vital aspects of my doctoral candidature at the University of New South Wales Sydney. Furthermore, in 2015 the Shahkaar - Rukh e Mustafa undertaking was nominated for the Jameel Prize at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, with the travel grant for the project awarded by the University of New South Wales Sydney, and all material expenses borne by myself. At no point was any monetary compensation sought from the Pakistan Government in return for the three permanent works at the NAG. Nevertheless, the work was carried out in difficult circumstances, as the execution of the murals involved periods of hardship and poor health prior to a much-needed major surgical intervention. After the violent assault on the murals, the NAG administration appeared to be unaware of the incident upon inquiry.

Submission of all documents relevant to the Shahkaar - Rukh e Mustafa murals, supported by pertinent correspondence with the Director of the National Art Gallery (NAG) and the Secretary of Culture, and updates on the work in progress, to the individual Secretariats of the President and the Prime Minister was undertaken to facilitate both restitution, as well as appropriate punitive measures. Moreover, a letter of appeal was sent independently to both executive officers of the state; however, it did not elicit any response. The President and the Prime Minister of Pakistan failed to take the necessary action. To my great dismay, members of the bureaucracy advised me to publicly solicit the support of radical elements through a press conference, an action that could catalyse public outcry, heinous bloodshed, and chaos, an outcome completely at odds with the teachings of Prophet Mohammed PBUH. Thus, I found this advice insincere and dubious and rejected it entirely.

Colleagues, students in the art community, friends and family rallied to advocate against the censorship of my work in the public domain, most definitively demonstrated through the Facebook Page established for this purpose. I was profoundly moved by the intercession of my childhood friend, artist, and critic Saira Dar, who had the foresight to compose a letter to the editor and submit it to the Dawn press in order to counter the continued media repression of my work. I am greatly humbled by the acts of solidarity of all those involved.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan sadly remained silent on the matter. However, on September 28th, 2019, in his 'supreme' political discretion garnered international recognition with a momentous speech at the United Nations on the pressing need for a shift in public perception to ensure the prevention of blasphemous acts against the Prophet PBUH in the West. Taking political advantage of this contentious situation, he has since contrived to position himself as a symbol of moral fortitude on an international platform and celebrated what he perceives to be a task of galactic proportions.

The sacrilegious act committed against the Prophet PBUH in the Prime Minister's own backyard, however, was eschewed from the equation. It stands in stark contrast to Prime Minister Khan's efforts to move heaven and earth to redeem the wounded social fabric of the Muslim Ummah on the international platform. My sympathy notwithstanding, at a time when Mr. Khan is devastated by the injury to the lower regions of his psyche, inhabiting his flesh

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and muscle in the leg, 'My Assassination at the NAG' draws attention to the normative integrity of the aesthetic object of experience foregrounding the magnitude of the social wound instigated by what I conclude constitutes an epistemic rupture. Its genealogy notwithstanding, the work of art sacred or secular in its discursive and affective potential is an extension of the embodied, atemporal mind, the Heart in Sufic parlance enmeshed in the cosmic web of the infinite continuum of existence. The immensity of the trauma inflicted on the extended mind caused by such desecration is incalculable, and the deep-seated hurt that it has caused to my heart that resonates with the atemporal reality of the heart of the Prophet PBUH is unatonable, irredeemable. Rukh e Mustafa was not created for destruction or irreverence. The mission of the NAG constitutes the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage and not the obliteration of its authentic living tradition and intellectual legacy.

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