

ENCLOSURE/ ERASURE

IMRAN CHANNA

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by Imran Channa

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ENCLOSURE / ERASURE

SPECTRAL MEMORIES

Iftikhar Dadi

Imran Channa translates archival photography into abstraction. This is accomplished through a rigorous practice of drawing and erasure in all works in the three series shown in the *Enclosure/Erasure* exhibition. Central concerns of Channa's extended investigation revolve around the question of historical truth associated with the photograph, and how our understanding of history remains malleable to ideology despite the ostensibly stubborn veracity of photographic evidence. If even the most reliable visual artifact in the archive cannot guarantee truth, how can we situate ourselves as subjects of history? These questions are absolutely central to subjectivities in South Asia today, as we individually and collectively seek a responsible relation to our history, beyond the siren song of exclusivist postcolonial nationalisms.

Since its inception in 1839, photography has been associated with an unparalleled truth claim, arguably much more so than other kinds of artifacts such as written accounts or history paintings. The photograph has been seen to provide a measure of truth that is manifest and visible (and this widely accepted conviction has paradoxically not weakened even in our era of Photoshop manipulation.) One way to understand the continued force of this belief is by theorizations that locate the photograph as an indexical medium. Just as the fingerprint is an index whose presence guarantees that the very person whose fingerprint is recorded was not only present, but physically pressed a part of their body to leave a trace, similarly, the photograph-as-index is also an artifact created through a direct impression of whatever is before placed before the camera lens. As soon as the exposure is made, the photographic negative faithfully records the very presence of the landscape, object, or person (of course framed by camera placement, choice of lens, and exposure time etc.) But even if the photograph was staged or set up in such a way that it creates an image that departs from "reality," nevertheless the final photograph is nothing other than a material and mechanical tracing of all these actions performed in its making, which is its truth. Also, the photographic field of view does not make distinctions between the objects placed in its view, and records all without hierarchy, producing a powerful set of responses associated with realism.

This realism is a major factor in the truth-effect the photograph evokes; "the photograph cannot lie," John Berger had insightfully noted, but he immediately qualified this by observing, "by the same token, it cannot tell the truth; or rather, the truth it does tell ... is a limited one." This is because a photograph is nothing but an artifact that freezes a moment into a flattened rectangular space, and disconnects this rectangle from the ceaseless flow of time. It can never be equated or synchronized with the fullness of actual presence. Even in the most saturated instances of photographic ubiquity, we have but a finite number of photographs, taken from selected angles at discrete and discontinuous moments in the continuous flux of time. The photograph thus provides us only with fragments—social hieroglyphs—whose meanings individuals and societies continually strive to fabricate and secure later. To create these new significations for legibility, the photograph must be immersed in a new discursive context quite different from its originary space-time continuum, and this necessary act of reinscription is also where the meaning of the photograph is reworked.

Channa has utilized two kinds of photographs in the making of these works. The first is a set of personal photographs, which he understands to be a "personal archive." These are everyday photographs of life in Shikarpur, Lahore, and of various events and landscapes of ordinary character. The other works are comprised of historical photographs of India's Partition in 1947. In *Memories*, both archives are deployed but in such a way that it becomes impossible to identify their source, while the series *Eraser on Paper* and *Error* are based entirely on the Partition photographs.

The Partition marks a momentous, deeply contested series of events in the history of modern South Asia, and has been the subject of much scholarly work, biographical recounting, and as a continued provocation for contemporary artists. Its aftermath continues to foster mistrust and violence between the governments and the peoples of India and Pakistan. How does one arrive at the "truth" of the Partition today? How can its histories be comprehended and their complex and contestatory claims untangled to arrive at some form of reckoning? Since the event is so overdetermined and official history texts are so clearly tendentious, one has no choice but to look at the various kinds of evidences that constitute its historical archive. Much of the history of the Partition is recounted in official papers, by accounts of the people involved in the decision-making process, or the oral memories of those who were subjected to its unsettling effects. Within the range of materials in the historical archive, the photograph arguably occupies a unique place in providing a view of how Partition impacted everyday life, without ideological manipulation. But is this really the case?

One might imagine that because the Partition happened in the full light of history during the mid-20th century, and since it marks such a monumental series of events, that one would find a variety and profusion of photographic evidence documenting its complex dimensions. However what circulates instead is an extremely limited number of photographs. There are numerous photographs of leaders engaged in negotiations, or addressing masses of people leading up to the Partition. But the few photographs of ordinary people, migrants, refugees caught in its maelstrom have been taken by primarily Western photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson and most notably, Margaret Bourke-White. These were published not in South Asia, but as photo essays in American magazines such as LIFE. Today, when one seeks visual evidence of the Partition on everyday life, one encounters only this small body of photographs, and one struggles to reconcile the powerful, yet fragmentary and limited scope of this archive with the tremendous scale of widespread violence and physical and psychic displacement that the Partition engendered.

Channa bases much of his work on these iconic photographs of the Partition. His process in all three series involves first producing large-scale drawings using a dark pencil such as a 9B, to create an enlarged realist image faithfully based upon the archival photograph. After the drawing has been completed, Channa practices a laborious process of erasure and re-inscription, effacing the legibility of the original image. This process of erasure is extremely arduous. It involves a very considerable effort, and is physically painful on the muscles and fingers of the artist. This sense of bodily involvement, pain, and fatigue, as Channa reworks and erases the photographic image, creates an embodied act of creative destruction leading to a kind of new inscription, which insists of the necessity of the substrate image even as it seeks to question its veracity and its positivist transparency. Channa, of course, cannot give us the "truth" of the Partition, or even of his own personal past. But instead, these works offer another kind of evidence, that of continued psychic disturbance that is produced when history—in large and small ways—is remade and in turn molds our lives, and how this process of fabrication is ceaselessly and continuously inflected by power and ideology.

Erasures and reworkings are handled by the artist in three different ways, specific to each series. In the series titled *Error*, the drawings are erased in such a manner that the original image creates thick arc-like smudges across the surface of the paper. The end result is a tension between two pictorial languages simultaneously at play in each work. The remaining ghostly outlines of the original drawing are now overlaid with abstract expressionist form. The delicacy and fineness of underlying image is interrupted by the gross smudges, in a manner in which neither can be detached from each other and each one interrupts the other. These works evoke a sensation of profound tension between abstraction and realism. These two modalities are also analogues for any methodological understanding of history itself. Is history to be entered through the concrete and the evidentiary, best exemplified by the specificity of the photograph and by all of its indexical claims? Or is the Partition better apprehended with a kind of abstracted affective overview, especially by those of us who did not experience its events firsthand? To put this another way and interpret the character of the lines and the strokes literally: is specific history recorded by the fine line to be contrasted with the sensory phenomenology of the broad brush?

Now let us turn to the works in the *Eraser on Paper* series, which are similar to works in previous series such as *Erasure drawings* (2013). Here, however, the drawing has been completely erased, leaving behind only the spectral outline and shape of the original drawing. Without referencing the original source-photograph, it becomes very difficult to reconstruct the original image—all that one can make out now is a kind of a uncanny landscape characterized by ghostly shapes that trigger a resemblance to things one might see before—associations with unfashioned forms that one struggles to situate and define. These works evoke tentative, hesitant, but nevertheless dissonant resonances with prior imagery stubbornly lodged in the crepuscular regions of one's memory.

In the *Memories series*, the act of erasure proceeds not towards evacuation and lightness, but towards density and opacity. Channa completes the original drawing faithfully, just as in the other series. But now the work is methodologically erased in regularly spaced steps with the assistance of a ruled surface. The first erased drawing, which still retains a smudged original image with vertical or horizontal orientations, is then redrawn and erased again, a process that is repeated several times, until the massed dense black outlines are interrupted by striations of horizontal or vertical patterns, rendering instability and dynamism to the heavily worked final image. Unlike the faint ghostly shapes in *Eraser on Paper*, here the association is much bleaker, resonating with mental specters

of darkness and oblivion. But since the striations are evenly spaced, curiously the final drawing also retains a quality associated with the photograph—the character of a mechanically produced image, but one that is abstract. This tension between the regularity of the striations and the primeval organic shapes of the massed forms can be allegorized as the tension of the individual lives that are caught in modern ideological regimes that grind on, and the gyres of history continue to turn ceaselessly, over the bodies and lives of individuals and communities. Moreover, in these works the personal archive is equated with the historical archive—this correspondence suggests that even one's own personal memory is not secure, but open to a process of reinscription beyond one's own conscious perception.

¹ John Berger, "The Ambiguity of the Photograph." In *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader*. Edited by Kelly Askew and Richard R. Wilk (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 53.

² For a recent summary of scholarly and biographical approaches to the Partition, see David Gilmartin, "The Historiography of India's Partition: Between Civilization and Modernity," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, Issue 01 (February 2015): 23-41. On the work of contemporary artists dealing with Partition, see Iftikhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar, eds. *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space* (London; Ithaca, NY: Green Cardamom; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 2012).

Iftikhar Dadi is Associate Professor at Cornell University in the Department of History of Art. He also served as Chair of the Department of Art (2010-14). Publications include *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (University of North Carolina Press 2010), and essays in numerous journals and edited volumes. He is Contributing Editor for *Bio-Scope: South Asian Screen Studies* journal, and has served as member of the Guggenheim Museum's 2014 Asian Art Council.

Curated exhibitions include *Lines of Control* (with Hammad Nasar) on partitions and borders (Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell, 2012 and Nasher Museum at Duke, 2013); and *Tarjama/Translation* (with Leeza Ahmady and Reem Fadda) on the art of the Middle East and Central Asia (Queens Museum of Art, 2009 and Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 2010).

As an artist he collaborates with Elizabeth Dadi, they have shown widely internationally. Exhibitions include 24th São Paulo Biennial, Brazil; Third Asia-Pacific Triennial, Australia; Liverpool Biennial; Walker Art Center, Minnesota; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Queens Museum of Art, New York; and Art Gallery of Windsor, Canada. Work has been included in numerous publications and exhibition catalogs including *Fresh Cream* (Phaidon Press) and reviewed in *Art Monthly*, *The Guardian* (UK) and *The New York Times*.

*/ERASER ON PAPER
/MEMORIES SERIES
/ERROR*



[Work in progress]
Eraser on Paper i, Graphite on paper, 52 x 35 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Final work]
Eraser on Paper i, Eraser on paper, 52 x 35 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Work in progress]
Eraser on Paper ii, Graphite on paper, 52 x 35 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Final work]
Eraser on Paper ii, Eraser on paper, 52 x 35 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Work in progress]
Eraser on Paper iii, Graphite on paper, 52 x 35 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Final work]
Eraser on Paper iii, Eraser on paper, 52 x 35 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



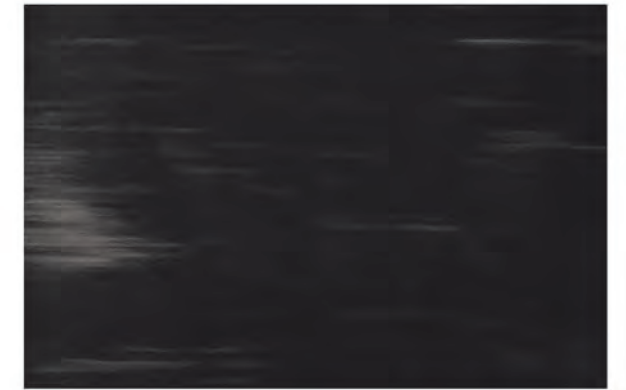
[Work in progress]
Eraser on Paper iv, Graphite on paper, 52 x 35 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Final work]
Eraser on Paper iv, Eraser on paper, 52 x 35 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Memories Series, Work in progress,
Graphite and erasure on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Memories Series, Work in progress,
Graphite and erasure on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Work in progress (Top),
Final work (Opposite page), *Memories Series*, Graphite and erasure on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



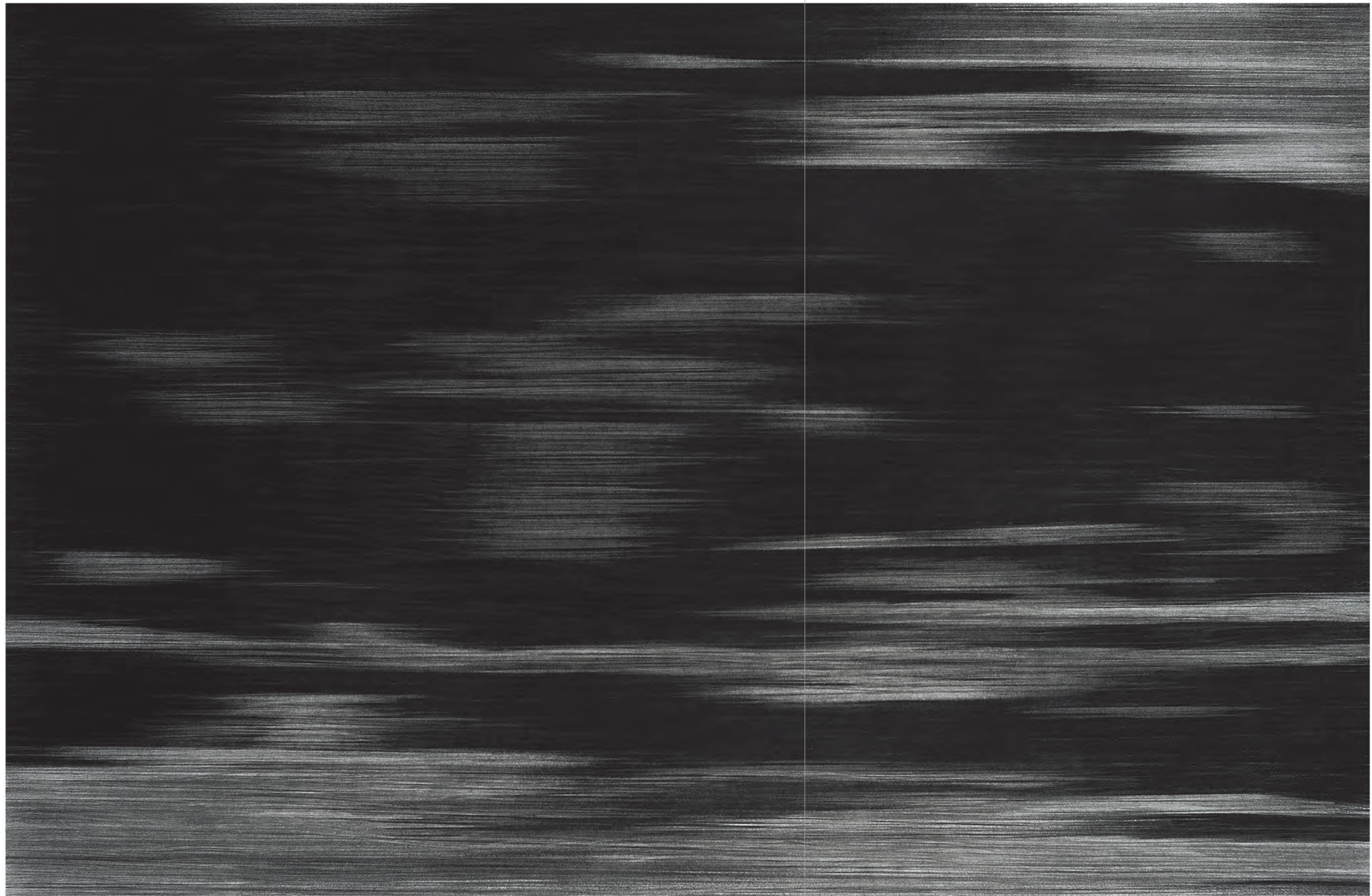
Detail (Opposite page)
Memories Series, Graphite and eraser on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Detail (Opposite page)
Memories Series, Graphite and eraser on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Detail (Opposite page)
Memories Series, Graphite and eraser on paper, 52 x 52 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Memories Series, Graphite and eraser on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Memories Series, Graphite and eraser on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Memories Series, Graphite and eraser on paper, 34 x 72 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Detail (Opposite page)
Memories Series, Graphite and eraser on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Detail (Opposite page)
Memories Series, Graphite and eraser on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



Detail (Opposite page)
Memories Series, Graphite and eraser on paper, 29 x 43 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Work in progress]
Error i, Graphite on paper, 22 x 30 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Final Work]
Error i, Graphite on paper, 22 x 30 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Work in progress]
Error ii, Graphite on paper, 22 x 30 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Final work]
Error ii, Eraser on paper, 22 x 30 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Work in progress]
Error iii, Graphite on paper, 22 x 30 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Final work]
Error iii, Eraser on paper, 22 x 30 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Work in progress]
Error iv, Graphite on paper, 22 x 30 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.



[Final work]
Error iv, Eraser on paper, 22 x 30 inches, Imran Channa, 2015, Lahore.

IMRAN CHANNA

Lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan. Born in Shikarpur, Sindh. **Education:** 2008-MA Hons. Visual Arts, National College of Arts, Lahore. 2004-BFA (Painting) National College of Arts, Lahore. **Solo shows:**2015-Enclosure/Erasure at Koel gallery Karachi, 2013-Solo Project with XVA gallery at Art Basel HK 2013 in Hong Kong. 2012-"Lik Likoti" Solo show at Canvas Gallery Karachi. 2011-"The Memory is The Message" solo show at XVA gallery Dubai, UAE. 2010-"Badshahnama", Solo show at Tmproject Gallery Geneva, Switzerland. **Group shows:** 2014: "SINDH Reverberating sounds echo through the dessert" at Koel Gallery, Karachi. "I.D" at Islamabad Literary Festival 2014, Islamabad. "Stet", at Lahore Literary Festival, Alhamra art Gallery, Lahore. "Sindh Art Fest 2014", at frère hall, Karachi. 2013-"Asian Art Fair", London with Joost van den Bergh. Bonhams London: Charity Auction of Pakistani Art by Rising Pakistan. "Paper" group show at XVA gallery Dubai. UAE. "27th Annual exhibition of Punjab art association" at Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore. 2012- Faculty show at Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq gallery National College of Arts, Lahore. "Attaining Heights" group show at VM art gallery Karachi. "Soul searchers" 3-person show at Rohtas gallery Islamabad. "Band baaja baraat" IVS gallery Karachi. 2011-"The Return" 3rd International Festival of Contemporary Art at (MOMA) Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Algiers. "Open Studio" at Gasworks Studio, London. "Contemporary Istanbul", art fair in Istanbul. "After All" group show at Royat gallery Lahore. "Finalist exhibition of the sovereign Asian Art prize 2010" at The Rotunda, Exchange Square, Hong Kong. "Contemporary Shahnama", millennium paintings Exhibition traveling show at NCA in Lahore. "Common Threads": Contemporary Art from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran and Pakistan. Xerxes gallery with NMArt gallery at the Bastakiya at the Heritage House Gallery. Dubai. 2010-"Contemporary Shahnama", millennium painting Exhibition at The Prince's Foundation Gallery, London. "The Rising Tide", Group Show, at Mohatta Palace Karachi "The sovereign Asian Art prize" finalist exhibition, ARTSPACE at Helutrans, Singapore. "Slick 2010", Art fair, Paris. France. "Creating Common wealth", Group show curated by Ragini Gallery, New Delhi India. "Fatah Je Asay Pasay", Group show (Green Cardamom) at V.M Art Gallery Karachi, Sindh Museum Hyderabad. "Structures Within An Intervention" -A Group Show at The Guild Art Gallery, New York, USA. "Making of The History" Two person show at Canvas Gallery Karachi. "The Havelian Express" 3-person show at CAIS Gallery Hong Kong. 2009-"Tradition & Tension" 4 person show at Art Scene Gallery Karachi. "Patrons Of "Oh My God! I Can Buy Art!" Group show at Grey Noise gallery Lahore. "Redo Pakistan". Deptford X festival London. "Redo Pakistan" Group show in the form of symposium at Alhamra art council Lahore. "Between Black & White" 4-person show at Canvas Gallery Karachi. "Redo Pakistan" arranged by Other Asias, a London based organization at Shanakhit Festival 2009 Karachi. "Starring: The Artist" Group show at Indus Valley Gallery Karachi 2008-M.A (Hons.) Degree show at Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq Gallery

college of Arts. "Young artist exhibition" at Alhamra Art Council Lahore. 2007-"Dropping Tears Together" an anokha laadla collective live art performance at Alhamra Art Council Lahore. 2006-"Places Real and Imagined" Group Exhibition at Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore. 2005-"Art Aid" Group Exhibition at Convention Center Islamabad. "Voices" Group Exhibition by Pakistan Development Forum Islamabad. "Emerging Talent" Group Exhibition at V.M Art Gallery Karachi. "Memories" Degree Show at National College of Arts Lahore. 2003-Group Exhibition of Printmaking at Zahoor-ul-Akhlaq Gallery Lahore. **Teaching Experience:** Teaching at National College of Arts, Lahore since Jan 2007 to date. **Artist in Residence:** 2011-Artist in residence at Gasworks residency in London. UK. s **Awards & Prizes:** 2013-Awarded the "Award of Excellence" by Artists Association of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. 2011-Selected for the Gasworks, Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust, artist in residency for three months in London, UK. 2010-Finalist for the Sovereign Asian Art Prize 2010. Hong Kong. 2003-04- Merit scholarships at National College of Arts Lahore. 1999- 1st Prize in painting competition on celebrity of artist A.K Sheikh at Sindh Museum Hyderabad. Award in painting competition at Khana-e-Farhang Iran. **Reviews, articles** Studio visit: Imran Channa by Sehr Jalil Raja, ArtNowPakistan. Interview: Re-aligning historical perspective: in conversation with Amra Ali. Dawn, August 11, 2013. Alina Husain, "Art as communication" Herald, February 2013, Karachi. M. Saeed Qureshi, "Elucidating illusion". Daily Dawn, January 19, 2013, Karachi. Peerzada Salman, "Lik Likoti opens at Canvas", 19 Dec 2012, Daily Dawn, Karachi. Shahim AKhtar, Imran Channa, "Lik Likoti" Pakistan art Review, Karachi. Interview. Jahan e Pakistan, newspaper, Karachi, 9th January 2013. Yusuf Ilona, "Soul Searchers" ArtNow. June Issue.2012. "The Memory is the Message" Al Ithad, Saturday, 11th June, UAE. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Return Favor", ARTFOURM, Algiers12.09.11.Meitz Manfred Ed, "Painting The Persian Book of Kings" Today. Cambridge: Talking Tree Books. Ansari, Saira. "Three Blind Mice", Papercuts Vol 7. Online magazine. "Artist Talk", Interview by Herald December 2010 Karachi. Khan Naiza h. 2010. "The Rising Tide", The Rising Tide New Directions in art from Pakistan 1990-2010: Karachi, Mohatta Palace Museum. Nasar Hammad. 2010. "Engaging Urban Realities Through A "Thinking" Photography". TheRisingTide New Directions in art from Pakistan 1990-2010: Karachi, Mohatta Palace Museum. Imran Khan. 2010. "Myth and reality". Pakistan's rising tide. AlJazeera. 2010. Marjorie Husain. "New Directions In Art": Mohatta Palace Museum. Thursday, 04 Nov 2010. Daily Dawn. Karachi. Peerzada Salman. "The Rising Tide opens". Saturday, 30 Oct, 2010. Dawn, Karachi. Asim Akhtar. "Pause Play". Libas international Magazine, Volume 23 issue 22010, Lahore. Quddus Mirza. "His pupil's voice". The News. Jul2010. Nasar Hammad. "Fatah jay Aassay Paassay". In the Milieu of Fatah Halepoto, published by Green Cardamom, London. Taimur Ahmed. "Think Beauty and heritage". Herald. August 2010. Salwat, Ali, "Brush with the Past". Newslinemagazine. 25 AUGUST 2010. Karachi. Adamjee, Maheen Bashir. "Messages for the Discerning", NEWSLINE, 31 May 2010, Karachi. Ali, Salwat. "Miniature on the March". Daily Dawn, April 25, 2010, Karachi. Ahmad H, Ameer. "Nostalgia, experimentalism and political games: 'Making of History/Green Patrol'". Daily Times, April 15, 2010, Karachi. Yee-Wan Koon, "Blindness and Insight", MUSE, February 2010, Hong Kong. Agnew, Mary. "The Havelian Express", Timeout Hong Kong, 19 Jan 2010. McInnis, Whitney Ferrare. "The Havelian Express", Orientations [The magazine for art collectors and connoisseurs of Asian Art]. Volume 41 - Number 1 - January/February 2010. McInnis, Whitney Ferrare. "The Havelian Express", Asian Art News January/February 2010. Zuberi, Nadeem. "Art Fact: 'Tradition and Tension'", Business Recorder December 26 2009 Karachi. Dar, Saira, "Fresh Perspectives", Sunday 22 November, Dawn.com. 2009. Ahsan Hamja, National Pavilion. PROJECT BIENNALE. This publication is supported by Chelsea College of Art & Design, University of the Arts London; Department of Art History & Theory, University of Essex; and, Sheffield Hallam University. 2009. Mirza, Quddus Starring: The Artist. IVS Publication Karachi. Aleem, Uzma. "Art transforms into industry". The Nation, Sunday Plus. Lahore. January 4, 2009. Naem, Mian. "Fusing. Real with abstract". Weekly Cutting Edge. Lahore 20 June 2007. Farrukh Nilofur. "Art and Sensibility", Daily News Karachi Mar 2005



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