

# DAWN

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## Artist's work: A journey into abstraction

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Sadia Salim | Published April 5, 2015



Memories series VI

**In her essay, *If You Don't Stop, You Don't See Anything*, Rika Burnham talks about the importance of deliberating upon works of art in order to be able to draw meaning from them. She lays stress on individual experience with art beyond labels and statements, “the value of discovery, the interest in things beneath the surface, the joy of looking and thinking”.**

One can easily walk past Imran Channa's large scale abstract work in an exhibition titled “Enclosure / Erasure” at Koel Gallery, Karachi, without thinking much about it or one can view it again and again drawing new visuals and meanings each time; these visuals change in intensity

and form when viewed from different distances and angles. To aid the dialogue with his drawings, the artist doesn't shy away from an animated discussion about his work or art and life in general.

Channa's work brilliantly binds together the artistic process, the visuals and the ideas that steer it. Beginning from his student days, the artist's oeuvre delves into the perceptions created by recorded histories and the images that aid our understanding of those histories. The current body of work emerges from the ideas that further took shape during his residency at the Gasworks in London, where he watched videos of American magician David Copperfield and how he fooled and delighted people by creating illusions. The objects at the museums in London also fascinated him, as they seemed to fix identities of people based on where they were acquired from, creating limited representations.

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The artist usually works with existing historical photographs, in this case images of India's partition in 1947 published in the LIFE magazine. Most of these images were captured by Western photographers with an outsider lens, raising issues of representation and exoticism.



Eraser on paper I

The other images that have been used are from the artist's own photographic record. These are then accurately drawn on archival paper using soft graphite. After the drawing is complete, the artist starts the process of erasing and re-drawing, creating layers till he attains a visual that concurs with his sensibilities or the paper simply tears under repeated erasures.

Often the resulting visuals are completely indistinguishable, just like an image captured from a fast moving vehicle where details are blurred into horizontal lines. Sometimes, during the process of drawing and erasing, the artist himself forgets the image he originally started to work with.

In some works Channa employs both kinds of photographs, one historical and the other captured by the artist himself. Both images are subjective viewpoints and are treated in the same fashion with a clear divide in the centre.

Perhaps alluding to the similarities yet opposing in their insider / outsider perceptions, one was propagated widely and the other privately. In a series of large drawings called 'Erasures', Channa completely erases the drawn image leaving only traces of what was once a readable image. And it is here that the inquiry into the past must begin, with a mere trace.

In our fast paced image saturated world the artist's work is an attempt to deconstruct our notions of reality and truth. It denies acceptance of any image as complete or real, rather it is a frozen frame in rapidly moving time. Channa raises the notions of creation and erasure, learning and unlearning, and questioning the reality that is presented to us or is perceived by us. His drawings create no representations, they are abstracted beyond recognition or are barely visible, persuading the viewer to stop, see and find individual images and meanings.

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