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EXHIBITION: THE MEMORY OF OBJECTS

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Historians have disagreed with each other's interpretations of the past since time immemorial. One of the reasons behind this is that different minds from different places in different contexts can never see the past the same way.

Furthermore, the workings of our memory, perception and thought fluctuate between each person, which consequentially poses the question whether history can ever be objective. History is a form

of recollection by an individual or a group and has never been inert, certain and beyond reinterpretation.

Imran Channa's solo exhibition that was recently held at the Canvas Gallery, 'Lost Pages from One Thousand and One Nights', challenges the veracity and reliability of history itself. History archived through oral or written forms carries immense probabilities for flaws and biases to seep in, making it a problematic documentation tool.

The exhibition comprises three series and a video installation, for which the artist sought most of the images from the book *History of the World in 1000 Objects*. The book inspects the lifestyles, beliefs and values of various cultures and early civilisations in a catalogue of the ancient objects they created. The objects are stripped from their context and assembled next to each other in a fabricated realm that essentially presumes the memory they retain. For Channa, the book instantiates a viable litmus test to expose the inadequacies and complications in how history is documented and collectively retold to imagine diversified accounts.

*Imran Channa highlights the forgotten
histories and memories embedded in
artefacts*

He effectively reiterates this idea in the 'Sleeping Beauty' series and the 'Order of Objects' series. 'Order of Objects' are digital prints depicting an assemblage of exorcised artefacts and archaeological ruins. Packed like sardines, the artist forces the objects to coexist on a singular surface, much like the book which inspired him.



‘Sleeping Beauty’ is an installation of sculptural gold relics such as weapons, monoliths and figurines that are freshly unloaded from wooden crates, suggesting the arduous journey they undertook for yet another presentation. These artefacts are devoid of context, history and identity, and the work becomes more about the larger body of objects than each antique.

In doing so, Channa also lays a critique of the institutional practices of museums, which commoditise such relics for viewership and patronage, amongst other reasons. The objects shift ownership under financial transactions and are very frequently packed, unpacked and relocated.

They repeatedly undergo the cyclical measures of being exposed and stored into concealment, and each of these processes continually distances them from their history.

This eventually moulds them into a phantom vestige of their former self, laid bare for us to observe. The audience is equally responsible for encouraging their spectral manifestation. We not only otherise and exoticise cultures, but also subconsciously display a fetish for animism. It becomes particularly apparent through our engagement with relics in museums.



Layering and erasing as tools of obfuscation are integral to Channa's practice. 'Lost Pages' is a series of drawings on canvas suspended as large-scale palimpsests. He derives the images from *The History of the World in 1000 Objects* but, by vigorously erasing the charcoal marks, he makes the text and image almost illegible.

Channa simplifies and distresses the drawings into obscure stains that convey hardly any backdrop behind the imprinted artefacts. The work highlights the fractures in how history is recorded, framed and devised. 'Light on the Fringe of Time' is a video that displays a microscopic

view of eraser residues. A ball of fibrous eraser strands sits next to the video. There is as much history and context concealed in those remains as it is absent from the pages Channa drew.

The fibres not only embody the untold and overlooked stories of the past, but they also bear the potential of possibilities for the future which, when studying history, is seldom acknowledged and rarely implemented.

History is constantly revised and rewritten, either influenced by those in power or considering the evolving socio-cultural climate. History, therefore, remains an enduring and robust source of debate for being necessary to one's differing places in the world, their visions and hopes, their quest for meaning, and their community's and nation's strive to quench the desire to establish their identity and destiny.

The German philosopher Georg Hegel famously said, "The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history." As much as we immerse ourselves in studying history to understand past mistakes, we also realise that history keeps repeating itself. It is never truer than today, amidst the volatile socio-political climate across the globe. Instead of admitting and re-navigating the current events immediately, we choose to acknowledge the mistakes 30 years in the future from an ironically reflective and rueful lens. History is always romanticised and addressed with sublime optimism.

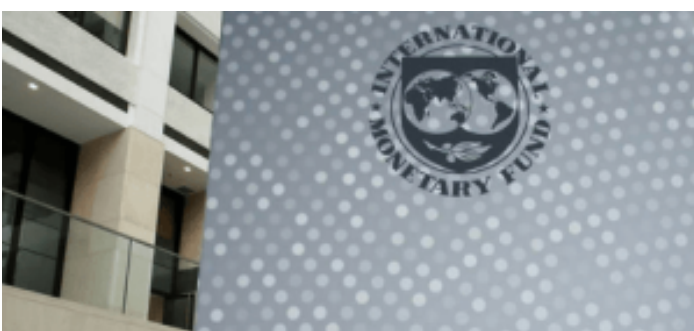
Channa's work skewers this practice by replicating historical objects that decontextualise the visual and material past. He addresses how relocating artefacts from different parts of the world and presenting them under a linear timeline distorts reality and eradicates the film between truth and fiction.

The truth is that history is a manifestation of an archived memory, and memories will always remain obscure and susceptible to change.

'Lost Pages from One Thousand and One Nights' was exhibited at the Canvas Gallery in Karachi from October 18, 2021 to October 28, 2021

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