

Words of art



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JUNE 22, 2016 00:00 IST

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In new light: The show uses language to explore the inherent beauty in scripts.

Three artists from three countries interpret their personal connection with words

Bringing together three artists from three countries, Tarq's ongoing exhibition, In Letter and Spirit, focuses on words and how the trio interprets text. Baroda-based Saubiya Chasmawala, New Hampshire's Youdhisthir Maharjan and Karachi-born Muzzumil Ruheel engage with text in their own distinct way and put up a thought-provoking show that is both captivating and eye-opening.

In Letter and Spirit features variations of a theme. Each artist takes the written word and layers it according to their personal context. For Ruheel, it's a narrative; for Maharjan and Chasmawala, it is awe-inspiring works that celebrate skill and intelligence.

Chasmawala uses text to engage with her past and her identity, including her relationship with Urdu. On the gallery's upper level, she has two sets of works, each distinct and tied together by text, like

an anthology. One series has Urdu letters written in the form of a string. The language serves as the basis for the series in which Chasmawala distresses and treats paper till the letters stand out as colours; she allows the treatment to take precedence.

In the second series, she uses photographs of Lothal, a city belonging to the Indus Valley Civilisation, as the base. She has stitched and painted the works on the original photographs. The works are sensitive to light and change over time on exposure to direct sunlight: an ephemerality that makes it stand apart from the other works on display.

Maharjan's work uses reclaimed book pages. Making them his canvas, he creates artworks that are painstakingly intricate and untethered by the conventional approaches to language. So, while in some cases it a recurring motif (like the letter 'O' in a work titled 'Beneath Her Feet'), in others, it is the haunting loss of text on a page, leaving only the outline. The way these letters are then rearranged — often haphazardly, always intricately — makes us re-examine our relationship with the page and the letters that stare back at us from books, magazines, smartphones and computers. The works haunt the viewer because of the intensity of the process and the simplicity of the concept.

Pakistani artist Ruheel is concerned with "examining the ambiguous and questionable truths that have generated our history and our story." He uses Urdu calligraphy, something that's decorative and often ornamental, to give shape to minimalist monoliths that tell stories of his own creation. By layering the flowing curls that are the hallmark of the Urdu written word, he highlights the rigid borders within which he works.

In a series of five paintings, *By The Sea, He Wrote*, he uses text to create a gradient, referencing the works of Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto, whose seascapes are similarly minimalist and gradated. The more personal 'He Wrote of Their Glory', sees him write text over archival prints to obscure a family history and create a new one with his words.

Overall, the show uses language to explore how we communicate and the inherent beauty in scripts. While Chasmawala uses her paintings to introspect and come to terms with her past, Ruheel uses the decorative aspect of language to create works that are dense. Maharjan's works are immediate and unfold over repeated viewings. By subverting conventions, he allows viewers to delve deeper into their relationship with the page and the written word.

In *Letter and Spirit* is on till July 2 at Tarq

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