



ART
AMONGST
WAR

VISUAL CULTURE
IN AFGHANISTAN
1979–2014

TCNJ ART GALLERY EXHIBITION
MARCH 5–APRIL 17

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College art galleries have a responsibility and an opportunity to present complex and daring exhibitions that expand and enhance the educational experience of students and the public at large. The exhibition *Art Amongst War: Visual Culture in Afghanistan, 1979-2014*, is one of the most challenging exhibitions ever presented in TCNJ's art gallery, addressing a topic that is not only replete with complexity, contradictions, and controversy, but also centered in a continuously evolving national and international situation. As Deborah Hutton notes in her introductory essay, the aim of TCNJ's exhibition is not to provide a comprehensive picture of visual culture in Afghanistan, but rather to pose questions about the relationship between the country's rich art forms and its long-term conflicts. Additionally, the exhibition provides a rare opportunity for visitors to view the work of contemporary Afghan artists, many of whom have never before presented their art in the United States.

We are tremendously grateful to all the artists who have generously loaned their work to the exhibition, often contending with difficulties in language, communication, and international transportation. We also appreciate the guidance of the TCNJ faculty members on the advisory committee, Dr. Jo-Ann Gross, Dr. Marla Jaksch, Dr. Susan Ryan, and Gregory Thielker. We are particularly indebted to committee member Jawan Shir Rasikh from the University of Pennsylvania, who graciously shared his expertise on numerous occasions. Special thanks are also owed to Professor Chung Chak and Professor William Nyman for invaluable assistance with the catalogue and photography.

A major grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities has helped make possible the exhibition and the accompanying lecture series: Mariam Ghani's presentation of *History of Histories: Afghan Films, 1960 to the Present*; Rangina Hamidi's discussion of her organization Kandahar Treasure; artist and veteran David Keefe's presentation on *Combat Paper*; Benafsha Tasmim's lecture on *Skateistan*; and Deborah Hutton's lecture at the exhibition opening. We are also grateful to the Committee for Cultural and Intellectual Community at TCNJ for its support of the exhibition and to the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission, which provides operating funding for the art gallery.

The presentation of *Art Amongst War* would not have been possible without the leadership, mentorship, and gentle perseverance of Deborah Hutton, who researched the topic for many years and taught an interdisciplinary honors seminar on the subject in the fall of 2013. Her students have written the 14 insightful essays in this catalogue as well the exhibition labels. We hope that the exhibition, catalogue, and lectures will open up a window for TCNJ students and Art Gallery visitors into the extraordinary richness, creativity, and resiliency of the visual culture of Afghanistan.

Emily Croll, Director, TCNJ Art Gallery



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Deborah Hutton

When we encounter an image, whether a painting, photograph, or video, we never approach it innocently, wholly neutral or unfiltered. Rather, each of us views it through a preexisting framework constructed from an amalgam of our individual experiences, the immediate viewing context, and our collective cultural memory, which in turn is shaped by media images, political discourse, and mutable concepts such as beauty, equality, and modernity. This framework fundamentally impacts the way in which we see (or don't see) an image. This situation is true of every image we encounter, but it takes on further potency when we consider images of other cultures and peoples, particularly ones with which our own government is militarily engaged. At the same time, images are not passive. They have the power to act upon their viewers, to alter the framework, which in turn impacts subsequent encounters with images. In this way, we might understand viewers and images as operating in active dialogue with one another.

The exhibition, *Art Amongst War: Visual Culture in Afghanistan, 1979-2014*, ultimately is about such a dialogue. It aims to expand, enhance, and problematize the way in which we see (and don't see) Afghanistan and its citizens by addressing two broad questions: What has 35 years of war done to the visual culture of Afghanistan? And, how have people employed visual culture to respond to the traumas of war?

The year 2014 marks 35 years since the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. From that point onward, the country has been in a near constant state of armed conflict or occupation; there is now an entire generation of adults for whom war is the primary lived experience of their country. Much of Afghanistan's cultural heritage has been destroyed, traditional society disrupted, and rates of infant mortality and poverty, not to mention civilian death and injury, are shockingly high. In the past decade alone over 14,000 civilians have been killed, based on the numbers given by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and the trend doesn't seem to be waning. According to UNAMA's most recent report, 2013 witnessed a 34 percent increase in the number of children killed and wounded.

Yet, at the same time, there are hopeful indicators of a "new Afghanistan" to be found. The year 2014 is the scheduled withdrawal date of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, and on April 5, in a heavily anticipated event, Afghanistan will hold presidential elections for Hamid Karzai's successor. Refugees have been returning to Afghanistan in large numbers, and economic, as well as technological, development is taking place at an unprecedented pace. In the midst of all of this, a growing number of Afghan artists and photographers are creating captivating works dealing with their country's current state of affairs, its future, and its past.

This exhibition showcases some of that work: from the diverse images being produced by the members of the Afghan Photography Network to the groundbreaking

art of the students at the Centre for Contemporary Art Afghanistan, from the intimate paintings made by young artists such as Mohsin Wahidi, Zahra Orna Kazemi, and Amin Taasha to the conceptually based video and installation pieces created by established transnational artists such as Lida Abdul, Mariam Ghani, and Aman Mojadidi. However, this exhibit is not a survey of contemporary art from Afghanistan. Nor should it be understood as an attempt to definitively answer the questions at the exhibit's core. Rather, the selected works are intended purely to provide a dialectical starting point for a reconsideration of the impact of long-term war and the role that visual culture can play in responding to such conflict.

To that end, the works were chosen with certain parameters in mind. First, it was important for the artworks to have been created by Afghans, whether residents, émigrés, or second-generation émigrés who have reengaged with Afghanistan. While many talented photographers and artists from around the globe have created thoughtful and provocative works dealing with Afghanistan, we felt it important to show that Afghans themselves are—and have been, even at the height of the conflict—using visual culture to express themselves, to provide some degree of economic relief, and to record what has been happening to their country. Second, we wanted to balance out the work of urban artists in media common to contemporary art gallery display (paintings, drawing, installation pieces, and video) with other types of visual expression. That includes photojournalistic images and short documentaries, and also textiles: the "war rugs" made in Afghanistan from 1979 onward, the exquisite embroidery done by the 400 women employed by the socially conscious Kandahar Treasure, and the supremely elegant silk pieces made by Zolaykha Sherzad and her Zarif Design Centre.

While not flinching from showing the devastating effects of war on the physical environment, social justice, human bodies, and human spirits, the works in the exhibit also reveal the constructive, creative, and poignant ways in which the people of Afghanistan have and continue to respond to their tragic circumstances. There is beauty, hope, and humor alongside the depictions of destruction, suffering, and struggle. Apart from the sheer diversity of visual expression, a few other characteristics came to the fore as we assembled the works, somewhat to our surprise. One is the balance of men and women among the artists and photographers showcased; this was not intentionally sought out but rather emerged organically as a reflection of what is going on in Afghanistan. Another was the youth of many of the artists and photographers. For example, the average age of the members of the Afghan Photography Network is 29, and Moshtari Hilal, the female artist behind the graphic pen-and-ink drawings on display, is just 21 years old.

Because of the collegiate context of the exhibition, we also wanted to take an interdisciplinary approach to the material and to make the entire process, from

conception to installation, an educational one. These goals are exemplified by the variety of essays in this catalog, written by the 14 students in my fall 2013 Honors seminar. Over the course of the semester, we explored the recent history and social circumstances of Afghanistan in juxtaposition to the country's long, rich cultural history, one often eclipsed by the decades of war. For many Afghans, their relationship with the past is fraught: it is something in need of resurrecting and, at the same time, something from which to be freed. In our seminar, we asked how artists and photographers have dealt with this seeming dichotomy in their works: how do the images and objects they have created reframe, question, celebrate, condemn, or erase the past? And, through these constructions of the past, how are the visual arts helping to shape the identity of a new Afghanistan?

Despite (or perhaps because of) 13 years of direct military, political, and humanitarian engagement with Afghanistan, for the majority of Americans, the dominant view of Afghanistan is of a war-torn, dusty, barren, cold, and broken land, a view constructed from images encountered in the commercial news media. But a close look at the country's visual culture reveals a much more complex and dynamic picture. Afghanistan's future is uncertain, to be sure. It is difficult to predict what will happen, but as the art on display makes clear, Afghan culture survives. It has been transformed by the decades of war, but it has not been broken. There is a new generation of worldly, daring, and determined Afghans working hard to better their country and celebrate their culture. They are not powerless victims, but resourceful actors, proud of their heritage, not afraid to be critical of the present, and cautiously hopeful about their future.



My first pivotal encounters with Afghan culture occurred in 1995, during my first year of graduate school. I spent my spring semester researching the patronage of Gawhar Shad, the powerful 14th- to 15th-century Timurid queen who employed the foremost architect of the day to construct elegant, cutting-edge monuments in the capital of Herat. I remember wondering whether the buildings would survive the conflict that was raging (her mosque is currently being restored) and if I would ever be able to study them in person (it hasn't happened yet, but I'm still hopeful).

A few months later I took my first trip to South Asia, where my travels took me to Peshawar, Pakistan, just 141 miles from Kabul. I was immediately transfixed by Peshawar. It was bursting with energy, not to mention with Afghan refugees and Afghan art: everything from museum-quality pieces to household knickknacks could be found for sale, much of it at a multistoried market in the heart of the old city. There I met a particularly charismatic and genial teenage Afghan boy, probably about 15 or 16 years old (most likely born around the same time that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan), working at his father's shop. As someone who had just struggled through my first year of Persian language study, I was awed by his ability to switch between Persian, Urdu, English, and French with seeming ease. I couldn't help but wonder what he could have accomplished if given the opportunity to complete his education.

While I knew about the conflict going on in Afghanistan, it was years before I fully comprehended the complete destruction being wrought on Kabul at the same moment I was in Peshawar. It was only in retrospect that I realized the museum-quality pieces for sale were very likely from a museum, perhaps the National Museum of Afghanistan, which was struck by a rocket in 1994. At a crucial point in my academic training, these experiences taught me that art history is not just an intellectual enterprise, that the objects and images we study are someone's heritage, key parts of their identity, and, sadly, too often pawns in political conflicts.

I would like to dedicate this exhibition to all of Afghanistan's queenly patrons, to the young man I met in Peshawar, and to the dear Afghan friends I have made since then. I also would like to offer my profound thanks to all the people who generously lent works for the exhibition, to the students of HON 370 who were great company on this journey, and to Emily Croll, who made the impossible possible over and over again.



Zahra Orna Kazimi

Untitled, 2013

Watercolor, pen and ink, and hand printing
on wasli paper; 13 ¾ x 15 ¼ in.

Courtesy of the artist

Timeline of Recent Afghan History



July 1973: King Mohammed Zahir Shah is overthrown by his cousin and ex-prime minister Mohammad Daoud Khan while on a visit to Italy. Daoud declares himself president of the Republic of Afghanistan, ending a 226-year tradition of monarchical government.

April 27, 1978: Daoud is overthrown and killed in a coup. People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), led by Nur Muhammad Taraki, comes to power (Saur Revolution). Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) is established. Kalq faction purges Parcham faction from party and enacts widespread social reforms, leading to resistance in the countryside.

March 15–21, 1979: Herat revolt. Afghan 15th Division mutinies against PDPA, killing Soviet advisors and beginning an uprising. Afghan and Soviet air forces bomb the city, killing 5,000 civilians.

July 3, 1979: President Jimmy Carter authorizes covert U.S. action in Afghanistan in support of the insurgency.

December 24–27, 1979: Soviet forces invade Afghanistan. Soviet Special Forces, Spetsnaz, assault presidential palace, stage coup, kill President Hafizullah Amin, and instate Parcham-faction leader Babrak Karmal as head of DRA.

1984–1986: Soviet military forces adopt strategy of mass terrorism in the countryside in an effort to separate insurgency from its base. Villages bombed and farmland littered with mines.

1985: U.S. President Ronald Reagan signs National Security Decision Directive CNSDD-166, expanding U.S. aid to the mujahideen, a loose collection of resistance groups.

1986: Mujahideen use stinger missiles for the first time, bringing down three helicopters. Calling Afghanistan a *krotovochaskchaya rama* or “bleeding wound,” Mikhail Gorbachev announces to 27th Soviet Party Congress that troops will withdraw from Afghanistan. Mohammad Najibullah replaces Karmal as head of DRA.

1989: Last Soviet forces leave Afghanistan.

1991: Carlos Bulgheroni, chairman of the Argentine oil company Bidas, fields the first proposal to build a pipeline for Caspian Basin petroleum across Afghanistan and makes deals with local warlords.

April 15–16, 1992: Najibullah's regime collapses after the mujahideen surround and take Kabul. Najibullah seeks refuge in UN compound in Kabul. Afghanistan descends into civil war as mujahideen groups fight among themselves.

1994: The Taliban, which originated from refugee camps on Pakistani border, rises in power, led by Mullah Omar and financed by the Pakistani government.

1996: Taliban forces capture Kabul and execute Najibullah. Afghanistan is now effectively under the Taliban's control.

1996: Officials from the U.S. company Unocal became interested in the pipeline. Acting on advice from Reagan's former Afghanistan advisor Zalmay Khalilzad, his associate Hamid Karzai, and Pakistani intelligence, government officials place their trust in the Taliban to make Afghanistan politically stable for a pipeline.

1996: U.S. pressure on Sudan encourages Osama bin Laden to leave that country for Afghanistan, where he had formed connections during the Afghan struggle against the Soviets.

1997: Taliban recognized as legitimate rulers by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Unocal executives fly members of the Taliban to Dallas to talk about the pipeline. The Taliban hires public relations firms to improve its image in the U.S.

July 1998: The Taliban massacres thousands of Hazara in Mazar-i-Sharif.

August–December 1998: After embassy bombings in the East African cities of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the U.S. begins to pressure the Taliban to give up bin Laden and urges U.S. ally Pakistan to do something about al-Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan; neither obliged.

January 2001: Taliban again conducts mass executions of the Hazara people.

March 2001: Taliban destroys iconic 1,500-year-old Bamiyan Buddhas.

October 7, 2001: U.S. invasion of Afghanistan begins. Rationale is to dismantle al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks, and to remove from power the Taliban, which had protected members of al-Qaeda, including bin Laden.

November–December 2001: Taliban flee Kabul and are ousted from power.

June 2002: Loya Jirga, or Grand Assembly elects Hamid Karzai transitional president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

December 2003: Constitutional Loya Jirga held, and new constitution for Afghanistan adopted.

October 9, 2004: First democratic election held. Karzai elected.

2006–2008: Artistic treasures from the Kabul Museum exhibited at sites in Europe and the U.S.

August 20, 2009: Second democratic presidential election held, marred by low voter turnout and electoral fraud. Karzai wins a second term after opponent Abdullah Abdullah withdraws from race.

May 2, 2011: Osama bin Laden killed in Pakistan, leading to increased insurgent activity in Afghanistan.

2013: Afghan army takes command of all military and security operations from NATO forces.

April 5, 2014: Scheduled date of Afghanistan's third presidential election. Karzai is ineligible to seek reelection.

Late 2014: Planned date for full U.S. troop withdrawal.

Afghanistan, 1979-1996: Foreign Designs and Cultural Muteness



Albert Charles Cavallaro

Between 1979 and 1996, Afghanistan was subjected to an invasion by the Soviet Union, a civil war rife with ethnic violence, and the reunification of the nation by the Taliban. Outside influences pervaded this era due to the presence of foreigners and foreign ideologies on both sides of the Soviet-Afghan War. Additionally, the Taliban, financed by Pakistan, introduced a radical form of Islam not native to Afghanistan.

The stage for this period was set in the early 1970s. After two coups, one in 1973 and another in 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) eventually gained power, setting up the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). The PDPA, whose base was primarily the urban elite, ran into resistance in the countryside, particularly after its members completed an interparty purge of the more moderate elements and enacted an incompetently planned set of radical reforms. The resistance grew thanks to an infusion of aid and arms from foreign powers, most notable among them the United States, which wished to drag its Cold War rival, the USSR, into a conflict.

The United States' wish was granted when, in response to the growing seriousness of the insurgency, the USSR invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. The mujahideen, or "defenders of the faith," a loose collection of resistance groups whose only unifying factors were their aversion to the communists and their Islamic faith, coalesced at this time. They were able to survive and fight against the occupation, eventually wearing down the Soviets, in part because of a constant influx of arms from foreign powers. When the Soviets withdrew in 1989, they left behind Mohammad Najibullah, president of the DRA at the time, to run the country. His fragile rule collapsed in 1992, leading to four years of civil war among various mujahideen factions. Finally, in 1996 the extremist Taliban came to power.

During the period of the Soviet occupation (1979–1989), 1 to 2 million Afghans were killed, about 1.5 million crippled, and another 5 to 6 million driven into refugee camps in the neighboring states of Pakistan and Iran. The USSR's war against the rural-based mujahideen left the countryside largely destroyed, with villages bombed and farmland littered with mines. The subsequent civil war shifted the focus of the conflict and the sites of devastation, from countryside to cities.

With the economy disrupted by continuous war, a drug economy arose, and opium replaced typical farming crops. Unsurprisingly, this rise of opium production contributed to higher levels of heroin addiction in Afghanistan and its neighboring states, particularly Iran. This growth of addiction is bluntly depicted in Rada Akbar's photograph of a heroin addict receiving an injection.

The economic and human destruction was accompanied by the destruction of Afghan culture. The plight of the National Museum of Afghanistan embodies this victimization of Afghan culture and history. Built in 1922, the museum was badly damaged in the chaos



Lida Abdul
In Transit, 2008

Single-channel video, 4:55 min.

Courtesy of the artist and Giorgio Persano Gallery, Turin

following the Soviet departure. It became used as a military base, and in 1994, it was struck by a rocket. Later its roof would catch fire and collapse.

Along with this loss of culture came pervasive images of violence, evidenced in the development of war rugs in the late 1970s. These handmade carpets depict images of tanks and guns against idyllic backgrounds of gardens or over maps of Afghanistan. This new cultural phenomenon in part reflected a recognition of the violence saturating the nation.

What truly characterized Afghan culture during this period was, in many ways, its lack of expression. First disrupted by the Soviet invasion, the interruption grew during the fierce civil war. The Taliban further stifled cultural expression by banning music, dance, kite flying, and graven images.

This period of victimization by foreign powers and cultural muteness, while now hopefully passed, is a time in Afghan history that, nevertheless, must be dealt with. Much in the same way that the nation is currently being rebuilt, the culture too must deal with this recent past. Lida Abdul's video artwork, *In Transit*—the title alone denoting a precarious temporal position—promotes a conversation between Afghanistan's history and the present. Through this conversation with the past, Abdul's piece introduces the possibility of redefining it. In the video, Afghan children pretend to fly a downed, forgotten Soviet plane, as if it were a kite.

Afghanistan 1996-2014: From Destruction to Cultural Rebirth and Rejuvenation



Chad Berman

The Taliban era (1996-2001) represents a destructive and calamitous period of Afghanistan's long, rich history. In 1996, the Taliban, a radical Islamic political movement that originated in Pakistan, seized Kabul from the mujahideen, thus beginning its reign of terror. A strict and counterproductive interpretation of Shari'a law became the new constitution, replacing the mujahideen's less extreme doctrines. Perhaps the Taliban's worst offenses were made against women. Under Taliban law, women were forbidden to show themselves in public without a male escort. When they did venture outside their homes, they were compelled to wear the burqa, a head-to-toe covering. If they dared to reveal any skin, they were beaten in public. Additionally, the Taliban banned all entertainment and representational art, including photography, music, and film. These prohibitions had a destructive effect on Afghan art; however, later they prompted a fervent resurgence of the nation's visual culture.

Life for artists was perilous under the rule of the Taliban. They had to keep exceedingly low profiles in order to not offend the regime, which would have resulted in beatings, or worse, death. Numerous artifacts were destroyed, including the iconic 1,500-year-old Bamiyan Buddhas. Many commentators around the world have decried that particular event as an unforgivable crime against art and culture. However, the destruction later would indirectly and unintentionally help spearhead the resurgence of art within the country.

There were a number of underground artistic movements that came about in response to the efforts of the Taliban to stifle art and culture. For example, a network of underground poets was created. According to the *New York Times*, these poets met regularly, memorizing their poems in order to avoid being caught by the Taliban with physical copies of their poetry. Rahraw Omarzad, an artist and journalist, was a pioneer in the effort to promote artistic ventures during the Taliban regime. Despite the danger, Omarzad created a magazine that showcased contemporary artists. Eventually he was able to build upon this project, in 2004 creating an instructional school in Kabul called the Centre for Contemporary Art Afghanistan, which still operates today.

The risk of being caught engaging in artistic and educational activities was even greater for women during this era. However, many found means by which to circumvent the oppression, attending underground schools. Photojournalist Farzana Wahidy, a member of the Afghan Photography Network, is one such woman. She attended an underground school in Kabul, carrying her books underneath her burqa. This risk ultimately allowed her to pursue a degree in photojournalism after the fall of the Taliban, something that would have been impossible to accomplish during her childhood. Through these examples, we see the renewal of culture out of a broken country that had been stripped of its identity throughout generations of war and an oppressive regime.

The revival of Afghanistan's visual culture occurred with vigor during the period of U.S. involvement in the country. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, led the U.S. to invade Afghanistan in order to dismantle al-Qaeda, which was using the country as a base with the support of the Taliban. The U.S. military arrived in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, strategically bombing Taliban strongholds. On November 12 of that year, the Taliban retreated from the city of Kabul, and by December, the last major Taliban center had fallen. While the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan perpetuates the country's state of war, it also has reduced the power of the Taliban. This has paved the way for the rejuvenation of Afghanistan's culture that has continued to spread throughout the country, despite on-going violence and future uncertainty.

In the wake of the collapse of the Taliban government, contemporary artists have emphasized the importance of history and reconstruction in the renewal of Afghanistan's visual culture and the reconciliation of the country's shattered identity. Mariam Ghani, an Afghan-American artist, demonstrates the rebuilding process in her piece titled, *Kabul 2,3,4*. It features a three-channel video depicting Kabul in 2002, 2003, and 2004, during the period of U.S. involvement, thus embodying the physical progress completed each year. She also details the significance of reconciling the past in order to progress as a country. In a recent essay, "Afghan Bloom," Ghani explains that unpleasant truths must be unearthed, and once said task has been accomplished, the venom of Afghanistan's generations of conflict may finally be leached out. Ghani, as well as other contemporary artists, believe in a dialogic approach to dealing with past grievances. This fearless confrontation of the past is a direct result of the empowered visual culture of Afghanistan.



Mohammad Aref Karimi
Afghan Youths Learning to Paint at the Behzad Art Gallery, Herat, 2012

Digital color photograph
Courtesy of the artist

The Impact of War on the Land and Cities in Afghanistan



Kim Barrett

Due in large part to its location, the history of Afghanistan is marked by invasion and migration that has impacted the ethnic and cultural diversity of the country. The geographic variety of the land also has contributed to regional diversity. The ways in which Afghans have interacted with their land historically has been determined by the topography and natural resources of each particular region of the country. The past several decades of war have disrupted the traditional regional relationships between Afghans and the land and forced new forms of interaction to develop, namely a shift from rural living to urban living.

Afghanistan is a landlocked country bordered by China, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Mountains, most significantly the Hindu Kush range running from the northeast to the southwest, dominate much of the terrain, with the highest peaks reaching over 22,000 feet high. Heavily irrigated plains with the country's most fertile soil for agriculture are located in the north-central and southwestern regions. Portions of the southwest are also covered by desert. While there are several rivers running throughout the country, there are no major bodies of water. Access to fresh water is limited for many Afghans, making agriculture beyond the subsistence level difficult for all except those in the easily irrigated plains.



Najibullah MUSAFAER
Kabul City, 2007
Digital color photograph
Courtesy of the artist

The dichotomy between the plains and the mountainous regions is one of the most defining features of Afghanistan's geography, impacting societal development. The plains tend to be intensively irrigated and more populated; agricultural surplus has led to hierarchical systems based on land ownership in these areas. The mountain and desert regions are less densely populated, with subsistence-based economies and more egalitarian cultures. The center of government historically has been located in the plains regions, whereas the inhabitants of the mountains have tended to cling to independence and resist central governance. While the diversity of ethnic identities in Afghanistan has influenced national politics for centuries, the geographical characteristics of different regions are equally, and sometimes more, influential on government and societal structures.

Regardless of regional or ethnic identity, the majority of Afghans have traditionally interacted with the land as farmers, nomads, and/or pastoralists. The rural economy that historically dominated the country was based on families working to produce only what they needed to survive through farming or herding animals. Production of goods for use by the family, rather than accumulation of profit, was central. Strong loyalties based on family and clan ties developed as a survival strategy in these subsistence economies.

The decades of war that have ensued since the Soviet invasion in 1979 have impacted the traditional ways Afghans interact with the land, subsequently affecting aspects of the overall culture. One of the most potent legacies of the past three decades of war and conflict are the landmines that litter the landscape. Every warring faction beginning with the Soviets has left behind landmines: the mujahideen, Taliban, and U.S. military all planted mines in unmapped and unmarked locations around Afghanistan. These mines not only continue to cause high rates of death, disability, and injury, but they also impact the livelihoods of many Afghans. With the majority of the population traditionally dependent on agriculture or pastoralism for survival, the loss of usable land due to landmines has had devastating effects leading to decreased livestock, crop production, and access to water sources.

The increasing displacement of Afghans from their traditional homelands and, by proxy, from their traditional livelihoods has led to rapid urbanization. The growth of cities, particularly Kabul, since 2001 also results from the returning refugees and internal displaced people. Before the Soviet invasion, the population of Kabul was approximately 500,000. By 2001 it had increased to 1.5 million, and most dramatically, by 2011, it was over 5 million. Over 70 percent of returnees and displaced persons living in Kabul reside in informal, illegal housing. These informal settlements have changed the visual landscape of Kabul over the past decade. Afghans whose traditional ways of life have been irrevocably destroyed by war have turned to the cities in hopes of finding an alternative livelihood, resulting in a shift for millions from a subsistence way of life based on direct interactions with the land to dependence on an urban economy. The full impact of this transition on the overall culture of Afghanistan is still unfolding.

The “Displaced Persons” of Afghanistan



Britta Nippert

Afghanistan’s location has made it the playing field of superpowers’ games and desires for centuries. Its position also made it a core component of Silk Road trade as early as 300 BCE. During that era, Afghanistan was known for its rich cross-cultural interaction, such as the meeting of Buddhist, Roman, and Greek art in the Gandharan works in Mes Aynak and Bamiyan. Interestingly enough, despite the isolation imposed during Taliban rule, the present wars have indirectly caused another influx of worldwide influence on Afghanistan’s contemporary art scene. Recognizing this influence leads to some important explorations into the questions of identity and home.

The recent “worldwide influences” have traveled to Afghanistan on the backs of displaced persons returning home. “Displaced persons” are people who have relocated due to fear of persecution and are divided into three categories: refugees, émigrés, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). “Refugees” are defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) as those who seek refuge outside of their country of nationality to avoid persecution for reasons of “race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” “Emigrés” are defined as those whose financial wealth and connections made them capable of fleeing from their country to establish themselves in a country of their choice without the help of organized aid. “Internally displaced persons” (IDPs) are those who have fled conflict for the same fears of persecution yet, rather than crossing international borders, remain inside the country of their nationality.

Afghanistan has been the largest source country of refugees in the world for 32 years. In the 1980s, during the height of the war with the Soviet Union, an estimated half of the entire Afghan population was displaced. This tradition of displacement continues today, as the country has not seen peace in 35 years. Ninety-five percent of Afghan refugees find sanctuary in Iran and Pakistan.

Today, Pakistan hosts 1.6 million registered Afghan refugees, the largest such number in the world. Another 1 million Afghan refugees are estimated to live there illegally. Pakistani refugee camps have a long history in the politics of the region, serving as the base of the mujahideen resistance forces against the Soviets in the 1980s and the location of the fundamentalist schools that gave rise to the Taliban in the 1990s. Manipulation of the population by the Pakistani government in the 1980s has had long-term effects on Afghan refugees, such as forced reliance on aid (which is now diminishing) and increased fundamentalism within camp borders. These Pakistani camps are the production sites of carpets, including war rugs. Most girls are forced to leave school at the age of 10 to begin weaving, as these carpets are one of the only available income sources for Afghan refugee families in Pakistan.

The Islamic Republic of Iran hosts the second-largest refugee population in the world. These refugees, however, are assimilated into the urban fabric of Iran and have

greater access to health care, education, and job training than do the Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. The economic boom in the 1980s, as well as a worker shortage due to the war with Iraq, encouraged Iran to welcome the Afghan refugees during the Soviet War. With increasing economic sanctions hurting its economy, however, Iran has stepped up its policies against Afghan refugees, and deportations occur in great numbers. Exhibited artists Qasem Foushanji and Zahra Orna Kazemi both grew up in Iran and received their educations there before returning to Afghanistan.

Most of the technocratic elite of pre-Soviet Afghanistan fled to developed countries in the West to continue their education and raise families away from the conflict. The mass exodus cost Afghanistan an entire generation of teachers and educated workers, who are only now returning after the fall of the Taliban. Featured artists Mariam Ghani, Moshtari Hilal, Aman Mojadidi, Lida Abdul, and Zoleyka Sherzad are all examples of the émigré population, having either fled Afghanistan as children or been born to Afghans already in exile.

Repatriation of refugees, émigrés, and IDPs has occurred in great numbers since the fall of the Taliban. Since March 2002, 5.7 million Afghans have returned home. However, disparity surrounds the homecomings, as many Afghan refugees return without sources of income or the ability to return to their land. Émigrés, contrastingly, return with degrees from Western schools and win high-paying jobs. This has caused a rift in Afghan culture between those who stayed and those who left and has resulted in greater gaps between economic classes. IDPs remain a growing problem, however, as instability in the southern provinces of Afghanistan force families toward Kabul. The vast diversity of these experiences is apparent in the work of the exhibited artists, though the questions of identity and reconstruction of home remain constant.



Roqia Alavi

Tent Settlement in Kabul, 2012

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

The Effects of War on the Human Mind and Body

Grace Badaracco

It is undeniable that armed conflict has negative effects on its participants, especially when it lasts for an extended period of time. When conflict is large scale and erupts into war, however, the consequences become far more dire. The effects of war on an individual level—the human body—are intense and far-reaching, to the point where modern science and medicine still have yet to completely understand them. For combatants, the injuries of war do not end when they leave the battlefield; for civilians, being caught in the crossfire and chaos is not necessarily any better. The mind takes a heavy toll just as much as the body, if not more so, and often the psychological scars last for years after the physical ravages have healed or become manageable. This is typically the case with conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, the latter of which is strikingly common in Afghanistan. In recent wars, such as the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, the influences of such disorders on the psyche have become apparent in art produced by artists who spent their formative years in a war-torn environment or who were forced into exile because of the conflict.

Even those who have never participated in the fighting can still experience the terror of seeing their homes destroyed, being separated from family, or fleeing a battle zone, not knowing if friends and family have made it out alive. It is not only direct conflict as a result of war that can cause an individual to develop PTSD or other disorders, but also other events that may stem from living in a hostile environment. Some of these traumatic events may be indirectly caused by war, such as assault (particularly sexual assault), anxiety, or serious physical injury. Adding to these effects is the fact that individuals living in a warzone, particularly children, are at an increased risk of disease and malnutrition, making their hardship an even heavier burden to bear. For those who witness the pain or death of loved ones while themselves escaping unscathed (or escaping at all), the disorder is frequently compounded with survivor's guilt. Afghanistan boasts the most depressed population of any country in the world, with a rate of roughly 20 percent of Afghans suffering from depression. This rate is nearly five times the international average of just over 4 percent.

Intensifying the mental effects of war are the physical effects. Discussions of disfigurement, loss of limbs, and brain damage have entered into the discourse on the costs of war now more than ever before. As medical technology has improved, especially in the field, more soldiers and civilians alike are surviving injuries that would once have guaranteed their death. Afghans in areas directly affected by the conflict often see friends and neighbors who have had amputations after war-related injuries or who are missing limbs from landmines. Thus, although death tolls in recent wars are lower, the compromised physical and mental states of the survivors have long-term implications.

Just as varied are the victims' responses to what they witness; often, art can be both a result of war and a tool with which to cope. Many Afghan artists under the age

of 30 have either grown up or been exiled from a country—their homeland—that is familiar to them only as a site of conflict. Their formative experiences as children, teens, and young adults, as well as the means by which they express them, are as varied as the artists themselves—painting, rough sketches, poetry, and cryptic imagery evoking universal feelings of uncertainty, fear, dread, confusion, and hope. One of these young Afghan artists is Moshtari Hilal, who creates simple, monochrome, ink-on-paper works. Hilal's works are ambiguous, leaving open exactly what the shadowy and hybrid subjects represent. Her art has a visceral quality, bringing to mind a vague and unfiltered sense of apprehension.



Moshtari Hilal
Antique Mujahideen, 2013
Ink on paper; 16 ½ x 11 ¾ in.
Courtesy of the artist

The total effects of war on the bodies and psyches of those people caught up in the conflict are immense, and the full depth of the impact remains to be seen as more effort is put into understanding how much widely encompassing trauma results from large-scale human conflict. Much progress has been made in treating all manner of war-related trauma in the past century; if these discoveries continue, there is hope for the future that we will be able to understand and perhaps prevent unnecessary harm and suffering in years to come.



Olivia Harrington

A nongovernmental organization (NGO) is a not-for-profit organization that provides humanitarian-type services and is made up of volunteer citizens. A social enterprise is a commercial organization focused on improving human or environmental circumstances rather than on maximizing profits. In war-torn Afghanistan, thousands of NGOs and social enterprises have flocked to the country from various parts of the world to help people; however, funding from NGOs often has trouble finding its way to the Afghans in need, and critics question whether the work of many of these organizations is truly beneficial. The major obstacles faced by organizations in Afghanistan are transportation, security, and issues resulting from cultural difference. Kandahar Treasure provides an example of an organization that is successfully overcoming these complications.

Founded by Kandahar-born, Virginia resident Rangina Hamidi in 2003, Kandahar Treasure employs over 400 women in pursuit of its mission to revive the practice of embroidery in Kandahar and empower women in the process. Kandahar Treasure began as an NGO but recently transitioned into a social enterprise. Its website, kandahartreasure.com, is accessible worldwide and offers not only products but also detailed information on its workers and its mission. The organization has surpassed serious obstacles to create lasting change in one of the most dangerous regions of Afghanistan.

A major critique of international nonprofit organizations, particularly those in Afghanistan, is that funding is used to move people and supplies rather than provide aid. The location of an organization, thus, is critical to its overall success. Thirty-five years of war has not only damaged the villages of Afghanistan but also isolated them with the destruction of the country's roads. Afghanistan's landscape is extremely mountainous, making cross-country transportation difficult in the best of times. The country's newly developed "Road Ring" connects its major cities, including Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar, among others. As a result, many Afghans have moved away from the countryside and into these well-connected cities. Although over half of the Afghan population continues to live in the countryside, the majority of foreign support is now funneled into the cities, leaving very few functioning organizations outside the cities with the means to operate. While unfortunate in many respects, the fact is that the most successful enterprises recognize the difficulty involved in working outside the cities and take root in urban areas. Working in a city allows them to cut transportation costs; thus, higher percentages of their funds go directly to support key causes. Additionally, organizations operating within cities are able to more easily acquire the necessary supplies than if they were to be stationed in rural areas.

Operating in Afghanistan's second largest city and the immediately surrounding region has allowed Kandahar Treasure to increase the percentage of funding allocated to supporting Afghan women. Hundreds of Kandahar Treasure's employees work within their homes creating exquisite embroidery. A select number of other employees travel to



Sardar Khanum
Jala-doozi, 2010

Silk thread on rayon cotton; 10 x 60 in.
Courtesy of Kandahar Treasure

the women's homes to collect the work and bring it to the organization's headquarters in Kandahar city. From there, the products are shipped internationally, primarily to the United States. This organizational structure helps keep transportation costs down.

Security issues also must be taken into account. Due to the country's instability, organizations have instated various protocols to better ensure the safety of their members. Upward of 20 percent of most organizations' budgets in Afghanistan is spent on security. Necessary security measures can be minimized for organizations with Afghan members, thus allowing more of the funds to go directly to support the cause. Utilizing local staff has allowed Kandahar Treasure to be more cost effective as well as secure. Rangina Hamidi's status as a Kandahar native permits her to operate her organization in a highly dangerous area. All organizations operating in Afghanistan must take security precautions, but those with Afghan leaders or members are able to function more freely throughout the country.

Utilizing local staff also helps international organizations bridge the gap between local Afghans and foreign staff. The most successful enterprises working in Afghanistan employ locals in order to ensure that they are sensitive to regional customs and are welcomed by the people they want to serve. Kandahar Treasure not only employs locals but also works to engage the Afghan community and empower its members through educational programs. Westerners working in Kandahar may have difficulty adapting to the cultural differences of the region, but Rangina Hamidi's background has made her well prepared.

NGOs and social enterprises working in Afghanistan face innumerable obstacles, but preparedness helps yield success, and success must be measured in small steps. Programs must keep in mind the long-term goal of making lasting change and bettering the community in which they work.

Women in Afghanistan



Kelly Cullinane

Although Afghan women receive an overwhelming amount of attention from the Western media, the role of women in Afghanistan remains a complex, often misunderstood topic. Many Afghan citizens know nothing but war, as the fighting has persisted since 1979, and this perpetual conflict has greatly impacted the women of the nation. While the pre-Taliban era included a rather strong push for women's rights, the successes of this movement became insignificant when the Taliban came to power. Since the downfall of the Taliban, many Afghans have supported the movement for gender equality through organizations that employ and empower women, school systems, and health teams that specifically provide care for women. However, despite such recent improvements, Afghan women still face daily discrimination and difficulties.

During the mid-20th century the movement for women's rights in Afghanistan sparked. Women began to attend primary schools, which ultimately led to their enrollment in secondary schools and universities. In turn, the government gave women the right to seek employment in various jobs. During the 1960s and 1970s, women worked as newscasters, singers, actresses, teachers, nurses, and factory workers. At this time, organizations designed particularly with Afghan women in mind also developed. One such organization, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), created in 1977, still exists and continues to fight against the social injustices that Afghan females face. During the mid-20th century, women also gained social freedoms. After women of the royal family arrived at the 1959 festival of Jeshyn, the celebration of Afghan Independence day, without chad'ris, females were no longer required to wear



Gulbuddin Elham

Female Journalist, 2006

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

them. The chad'ri, also known as a burqa, is a garment that covers the entire body with the exception of a small piece of netting directly over the eyes and nose. As a result of the lifting of this restriction, new styles of dress developed in Afghanistan. Some young women in Kabul even started to wear miniskirts and low-cut blouses, while others wore long skirts and more conservative tops. Due to all of these reforms, women had more and more opportunities available to them.

However, when the Taliban rose to power in the mid-1990s, the situation for women drastically changed. The Taliban refused to let women attend public schools and placed restrictions on private schooling. Similarly, women were not allowed to participate in the workforce. Many attempted to set up private practices, such as soap making, candle making, and embroidery, within their homes. However, because they could not go out in public without the accompaniment of a male, women did not have access to a trading market and thus did not profit economically from their work. In terms of health, women suffered tremendously as well, and the mortality rate in Afghanistan skyrocketed. Because women were no longer permitted to work, there were fewer people in the medical field and thus fewer doctors and nurses to serve all the sick people.

Under the Taliban, all females were required to wear a burqa once again. While the burqa was symbolic of a respectable woman of high social status at one point in time, the burqa represented something entirely different when the Taliban reinstated it. It was a weapon to control women. Disobeying laws was punishable by death. Women were stoned, beaten, and whipped for wearing nail polish, exposing small sections of skin, or committing adultery. Regardless of the past successes of the women's movement, Afghan females endured extreme hardship under the Taliban from the mid-1990s until 2001.

Since the fall of the Taliban government in 2001, the situation for women has improved. Under the country's new constitution, ratified in 2004 by President Hamid Karzai, women have the right to an education, job opportunities, and free health care. There are more schools than ever in Afghanistan, and the literacy rate of women has increased. Some women are even attending medical schools again, which has helped decrease the mortality rate. Individuals, such as Zolaykha Sherzad, the founder of Zarif Design, have created companies to employ and empower women. Other women have taken on positions of leadership in order to take an active role in the women's rights movement and encourage females across the country to get involved.

Unfortunately, despite this progress, Afghan women still face discrimination from other members of their society. Several women in positions of leadership, such as Afghanistan's top female police officer, have been murdered. Young girls have been sold to obtain food, and women have been thrown in jail for simply disagreeing with men.

Throughout the last 35 years, the women of Afghanistan have experienced new freedoms and maltreatment, and the future remains uncertain. Regardless of the hardships facing Afghan females, however, the women's rights movement will continue to work for justice and equality.

The Social Standing of the Hazara: A Journey from Past to Present



Martín Crosby-Arreaza

The Hazara are a Persian-speaking, Mongoloid, Shi'a Muslim ethnic group who live in the Hazarajat region in the center of Afghanistan. The origins of the Hazara, like many of Afghanistan's ethnic groups, are unclear because they are the product of thousands of years of history witnessing invasion and occupation by many different groups. The most popular theory is that the Hazara are descended from the thousand troops Chinggis Khan left in Afghanistan, hence the name Hazara, which comes from the Persian word for "thousand." Of all Afghanistan's ethnic groups, the Hazara have been the most persecuted for racial and religious reasons and have remained at the bottom of the social ladder until very recently. The ethnic and sectarian violence after the Soviet invasion and during the Taliban regime increased the persecution they faced; however, the rapid social change following the collapse of the Taliban government appears to be ushering in a brighter future for the Hazara.

The social structure of Afghanistan is extremely complex. In some regions and among certain groups, ethnic bonds are the most important source of solidarity and identity, while in other regions and among other groups, religion is more important than ethnic ties. The Hazara are Afghanistan's only major Shi'a majority group, and their Shi'a faith has contributed to their persecution and marginalization throughout history by the Sunni-majority Pashtuns, Afghanistan's dominant ethnic group. Hazarajat was an autonomous region until the late nineteenth century, when Abdul Rahman, the emir of Kabul, conquered it. During the twentieth century, the previously disunited Hazara unified to rebel against the Pashtun-dominated government in Kabul as a result of the high taxes levied on the largely agricultural Hazarajat region. The assassination of King Nadir Shah by a Hazara in 1933 only further increased tensions between the Pashtuns and the Hazara.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 gave rise to a number of mujahideen groups fighting the Soviets. At the same time, the war deepened mistrust among Afghanistan's ethnic groups, and many mujahideen groups were divided along ethnic lines. Tajiks primarily made up Ahmad Shah Massoud's forces, the Gulbuddin Hekmatyar-led Pashtun group, and the Hazara rallied behind Abdul Ali Mazari. The Soviet withdrawal in 1991 led to a brutal civil war among Afghanistan's mujahideen factions, in which the Hazara suffered heavy casualties. The subsequent Taliban victory in 1996 proved a disaster for the Hazara. The Taliban, an Islamic fundamentalist group made up of ethnic Pashtuns, preached ethnic and religious hatred against the Shi'a Hazara. Upon capturing the city of Mazar-i Sharif in 1998, the Taliban massacred the Hazara in the city. In March 2001, the Taliban destroyed the ancient Buddha statues in the Hazara territory of Bamiyan in an attempt to destroy the memory of the Hazara's history. In Abdullah Shayagan's photograph of the Bamiyan valley, the huge, empty niches where the statues once stood



Abdullah Shayagan

Cultivating Potatoes, Old City of Bamiyan in the Background, c. 2011–12

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

add an element of tragedy to the image. The destruction of the Buddhas is yet another scar on the collective Hazara identity.

The technology and foreign investment flooding into Afghanistan since 2001, as a result of the U.S. occupation, have changed Afghan society at a rapid pace, largely to the benefit of the Hazara. Televisions and cell phones are becoming more common and serve to connect people to each other. TOLO TV, Afghanistan's largest television station, produces a show called *Afghan Star*, modeled after *American Idol*; it has seen several Hazara winners since its inception. Years of war have changed the country's demographics, as many Afghans have had to flee the countryside and migrate to the city in search of work. Najibullah Musafar's photograph of the Kabul skyline shows the sprawling metropolis that the capital has become in the past decade. The rapid shift in population from the countryside to the cities has started to break down the ethnic and tribal bonds that traditionally characterized Afghan society. While before most Afghans lived in small villages among people of their own ethnic group or tribe, migration to the cities has brought people into contact with one another in new ways.

The Hazara have taken advantage of these changes to assert themselves within Afghan society, in particular by placing an emphasis on education. The Hazarajat region currently has many locally and internationally supported schools (like Bamiyan University, where Abdullah Shayagan was educated). Many Hazara artists and photographers are making a name for themselves in Afghanistan's growing art scene. The large number of Hazara artists in our exhibition and in the Afghan Photography Network attest to these societal changes. The Hazara's emphasis on education coupled with the demographic and technological changes in Afghanistan have produced an environment in which the Hazara have new avenues through which to express themselves as equal members of Afghan society.

Afghanistan's Buddhist Heritage



Dylan Nguyen

In recent years, Afghanistan has been engaged in violence and conflict to the point that almost all that is remembered about the country is war, overshadowing its previous history. Part of Afghanistan's forgotten heritage includes Buddhism, a fact that is often neglected in discussions of the country that frame it solely in terms of Islam. Yet, from relics and ruins, it is evident that Buddhism also played an integral role in the development of Afghan culture.

Afghanistan was uniquely located at the center of ancient trading routes connecting Central Asia, India, and China to the Middle East and the Mediterranean, what we now refer to as the Silk Road. Roughly between the third century BCE and the seventh century CE, Buddhism made its way to Afghanistan via merchant caravans traveling the Silk Road, and Buddhist art flourished in the region. Buddhism incorporated representational art into its teachings from early in the religion's development. According to some accounts, in order to spread his teachings, the Buddha decreed that all temples were to contain painted murals depicting core Buddhist philosophies. Such art allowed common people to understand the basic concepts of Buddhism and facilitated the spread of the Buddha's teachings. The earliest representations of the Buddha date to the first century CE and come from Gandhara, an ancient Buddhist settlement in Afghanistan. The most famous of Afghanistan's Buddhist statues were the giant Buddhas in the Bamiyan Valley. Built in the sixth century, they were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. All that remains of the Bamiyan Buddhas today are the two enormous niches, carved from the cliff side, which once housed the statues.

Despite what recent events might suggest and the fact that Buddhism already existed centuries before Islam's inception in the seventh century, the two religions had similarities that allowed their traditions to blend together in Afghanistan. Buddhism was divided into various schools that each had their own doctrines, and early Islam was equally fragmented, as it was not yet codified into a singular entity. Both religions were tied to trade and commerce and incorporated emerging social trends into their teachings. Contrary to other religions that used rigid social structure to keep the ruling elite in power, Islam and Buddhism upheld the ideas of social mobility through the creation of wealth. A strong work ethic and sense of independence existed in both religions. In these ways, Buddhism and Islam appealed to the new merchant class and were well suited to spread along the trade roads passing through Afghanistan. With these diffuse beliefs spreading along the same routes, it was relatively simple for Buddhist and Islamic traditions to blend. The interaction between Buddhism and Islam occurred gradually between the seventh and twelfth centuries in the form of small-scale encounters. For example, plant shapes found in Islamic art in Afghanistan can be traced back to Buddhist artworks.

At the same time, differences existed between the two religions. Following a ban on representational art in the seventh century, early Islamic art was typically abstract, and the predominant art form was calligraphy. Some Islamic art was representational, particularly after the advent of the thirteenth-century Mongol Empire, when the link between Islamic and Buddhist civilizations was solidified. However, despite a burgeoning Islamic visual culture, not all Muslims accepted the use of representational art. Sculptures and illustrated manuscripts were indiscriminately defaced throughout Islamic history regardless of their associated religion. The performed vandalism was symbolic; only on rare occasions were works completely obliterated. Faces were smudged, and throats had lines drawn across as if cut in order to render the figures inanimate. While this practice has roots in hadith, traditions based on the personal beliefs held by the Prophet Muhammad, iconoclasm was often invoked to mask ulterior motives. Some speculate that the Taliban's 2001 bombing of the Bamiyan Buddhas was a retaliatory act in response to Western sanctions or was an attack on the Hazara minority living in the valley. Regardless of their motivations, the Taliban embarked on a campaign to remove all iconography from Afghanistan. They even destroyed Buddhist relics on display at the National Museum of Afghanistan, erasing a significant portion of Afghanistan's Buddhist heritage.

Despite the Taliban's actions, some Buddhist artwork still remains, and new discoveries are being made. Moreover, the outrage of the Afghan people over the Taliban's actions demonstrates the high regard in which they hold their heritage. Under the threat of destruction, Afghanistan's Buddhist past remains and challenges preconceptions about Afghan culture.



Amin Taasha

Silence (detail), 2013

Watercolor, pen and ink, and hand printing on wasli paper; 13¼ x 32 ½ in.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, Paris

Calligraphy in Afghan Culture



Julian Sison

Calligraphy, a literary art believed to have originated before 200 BCE, is the highest form of art in Islamic culture. Historically, the significance of calligraphy has been attributed to interpretations of the Qur'an that suggest that the art form was handed down from God. Calligraphy is continually referenced by the Qur'an as "the pen," which is believed to have been used to teach man and record all events from the beginning of time until Judgment Day. While 35 years of war have led to changes in Afghan calligraphy, the art form still possesses outstanding cultural value.

During the eighth and ninth centuries, as paper was introduced from China and replaced more expensive parchment, Islamic calligraphy became increasingly popular. Qur'ans themselves began to be viewed as art, and those who copied them were subsequently revered. Since training was difficult, very few calligraphers were actually successful. However, those who mastered the craft were often sponsored by princes, who used calligraphy as a medium for demonstrating their vast wealth. No expenses were spared in the production of royal Qur'ans; the sizes of sheets and qualities of materials used to decorate manuscripts symbolized the wealth of the patron. Rich decorations, extravagant bindings, expensive materials, and labor-intensive techniques marked the most prized manuscripts. When movable type was developed in Europe, it was centuries before printed books became popular in Islamic cultures because of the high value of calligraphy. Understanding the fundamental role of calligraphy in Islamic culture is vital to understanding the existence and evolution of this traditional art form in contemporary visual culture.

Analysis of contemporary Afghan calligraphy also requires consideration of the decades of war that have fundamentally altered Afghan society. The decreased literacy rate, the disruption in the education system, and the inability to acquire ink and other supplies necessary for the craft all have hindered the development of calligraphy in Afghanistan. Fortunately, there are forces at work keeping calligraphy alive. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) facilitate the process of training by sponsoring (much like the wealthy princes of earlier time periods) calligraphy masters, who can then accept apprentices and continue their own work. Afghanistan is further aided by its location between many other countries, including most significantly Iran, which allows for the importation of materials, styles, techniques, and educational practices.

Thus, with the return of Afghan refugees (who have spent time abroad among other cultures), there has been an influx of new ideas alongside the return of established practices. This is likely the reason for the similarities between the Iranian and Afghan evolutions of calligraphy. Most notably, in both countries calligraphy styles have branched in two directions: first, a traditional approach, and second, an untrained, leisurely approach. The traditional approach requires training in calligraphy with an expert artist, whereas the second approach does not.

The painted writing on Zolaykha Sherzad's dress installation is an example of traditional calligraphy, as evidenced by its poetic textual inspiration and Sherzad's formal training. The deep shade of red of the fabric in her installation *Hawa-e-Azad*, also featuring carefully rendered calligraphy, this time in gold pigment, is representative of Sherzad's own imagining of traditional Afghanistan. Her design company, Zarif Design Centre, aims to revive the art of Afghan textiles and exemplifies her interest in Afghan visual culture.

The untrained style of calligraphy has been a more natural development in Afghanistan, given the difficulties presented by continual war. Untrained calligraphers do not require formal education and are not confined to a single piece of paper or to religious matters. The work of Qasem Foushanji, a young artist inspired by calligraphy as well as graffiti, exemplifies the liberal, untrained approach. His paintings feature a sense of disorder consistent with Foushanji's interest in representing the less pleasant aspects of life, which he believes, "can be a way to create solutions." Thus, 35 years of war have provoked the existence of a less labor-intensive and more resource-independent pathway for Afghan calligraphers, a phenomenon that has occurred in conjunction with the recent efforts to restore the traditional face of calligraphy.

The various roles of calligraphy in Afghanistan today must be understood with respect to calligraphy's long history in Islamic culture as well as the effects of the last few decades of war, which have caused Afghans to struggle to maintain this art form. Traditionally calligraphy has held great significance in Islamic visual culture; that significance remains in large part because of its ability to evolve to suit contemporary needs.



Zolaykha Sherzad

Homage to "Bedel," 2010

Hand woven silk with black calligraphy,
silk-screened with the poem of Abdul Qader Bedel

Courtesy of the artist

Reclaiming Tradition: Persian Miniature Painting in Present-Day Afghanistan



Robert Handerhan

Known for conveying precise details on an incredibly minute scale, Persian miniature paintings are treasured by museums around the globe and further revered as an important element of Persian identity throughout the Persian-speaking world (including Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan). Based on epic poems and tales from oral traditions, these intricate works present gold-inlaid heroes vanquishing colorful demons in a powerful statement on the glory of the Persian imperial age and the richness of Persian culture. These glittering images tell of a lasting beauty that stands in stark contrast to modern-day photographs of the Persian-speaking world. Transmitted through the highly filtered lens of Western media outlets, the widespread depiction of a war-torn Afghanistan plagued by violence and destruction initially appears incompatible with the region's rich artistic tradition, but the nation's engagement in the complex process of rebuilding and redefining Afghan identity is directly connected to the revival of these traditional painting techniques. Recalling this artistic legacy, many contemporary Afghan artists draw on classical techniques and themes in their work, thereby marrying older traditions with the physical and psychological traumas of the modern day.

Archeological evidence suggests that the earliest known Persian paintings date back to the seventh century, and it is likely that artistic styles developed rapidly due to the influence of Silk Road trade. Serving as a crossroads between East and West, Central Asia was host not only to a massive influx of products and traders but also to less tangible influences, including various world religions and Chinese and Indian artistic styles. Artists adopted these new styles and techniques, and the miniature painting tradition began to take form with the help of courtly patronage networks that flourished under each successive political dynasty between the 10th and 18th centuries. Miniature paintings typically accompanied a written text, illustrating scenes from stories and poems in an aesthetically beautiful presentation that often incorporated calligraphy directly in the painting. One of the most renowned Persian painters, Behzad, who worked at the Timurid royal court in the city of Herat, created some of the most cherished and celebrated manuscript paintings. The refined works produced in Herat during the 15th century continue to inspire feelings of pride for contemporary Afghans reflecting on their country's place in this artistic tradition.

A more recent history of war and violence temporarily disconnected Afghanistan from its rich cultural past. The inadvertent destruction of art during the years of civil war took a toll on the miniature painting tradition, and the Taliban's ban on iconic imagery and general desire to control the public led to an even greater silencing of artistic expression. In the wake of conflict, however, a desire not only to physically rebuild the nation but also to revive traditional art forms fueled the restoration of these classic techniques, thereby transmitting them to a new generation. Accompanying the massive

amount of foreign aid funneled into Afghanistan, nongovernmental organizations such as the Turquoise Mountain Foundation were created, the central purpose of which was to establish schools and workshops to instruct artists on the use of traditional techniques. Presenting a means to restore an artistic legacy, as well as to bolster the local economy through the exhibition and sale of these new works, the growth of the Turquoise Mountain Foundation signifies a desire to redefine the image of Afghanistan while also bettering the everyday lives of Afghan citizens.



Mohsin Wahidi

Untitled Miniature, Kala Minar Series, 2010

Mixed media on paper; 11 ¾ x 15 ¼ in.

Courtesy of Theca Gallery, Lugano

The desire to reconnect with this artistic legacy, however, is not solely the product of foreign influence. Contemporary Afghan artists are revisiting classic miniature painting techniques through a synthesis of modern and traditional styles. This synthesis serves as a symbol of both the memory of past glories and, by extension, the hope that Afghanistan may once again manifest visible signs of its rich cultural heritage. Utilizing the small scale and figural imagery characteristic of works created during the 16th–18th-century Safavid dynasty, artist Mohsin Wahidi's *Kala Minar Series* recalls such earlier paintings. The artist states that he hopes to commemorate his ancestors and to memorialize "a lost civilization that doesn't exist anymore." Wahidi's works mourn the loss of life and of traditional forms but ultimately celebrate the revival of this cherished tradition in Afghanistan today. His intentional use of the miniature painting form suggests a decisive and deeply felt return to this important artistic technique and speaks of the hope for further cultural rebirth. By utilizing traditional forms to comment on modern events, Afghan artists are participating in a much larger process of reclamation and reconstruction, indicative of society's shared desire to confront the past and, by extension, to accept and build upon it.



Kelly Wilson

Around 1979, coinciding with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, new themes started appearing in the rugs of the country's northwestern Baluch people. Suddenly, representations of guns, landmines, fighter jets, and soldiers replaced, or appeared alongside, traditional carpet motifs such as plants and animals. This new imagery soon spread to rugs made in other parts of the country and in refugee camps in Pakistan. The motivation behind the creation of what are commonly called “war rugs” remains a source of contention among scholars. Researchers cannot pinpoint one simple reason because rug production is not a unified effort. Amid all the uncertainty, however, three primary motivations for their creation emerge to the forefront: monetary, political, and personal.

Few would argue that the creation of war rugs is not due at least in part to the weavers' financial needs. Be they in Afghan villages or Pakistani refugee camps, poor Afghans face harsh living conditions, and the production of handcrafted rugs is a reliable way to earn a living. International interest has been so vital to the selling of war rugs that some observers contend Afghans were never the target market at all. Rather, they argue, right from the beginning, the rugs' intended purpose was to be sold to foreigners in Afghanistan. Some rugs were undoubtedly intended to have commercial appeal to Soviet soldiers, as suggested by the existence of designs resembling Cyrillic text on early war rugs. With the loss of that market in 1989, the rugs changed accordingly. Those carpets made since 2001 seem to be designed to appeal to the new market: American troops. The portrayal of the destruction of the World Trade Center has become a common scene in the rugs, showing the makers' efforts to connect with this intended audience. English



“Do Not Touch” War Rug, 2000

Knotted pile, wool on wool, 39 x 79 in.

Courtesy of WarRug.com

phrases have replaced Russian ones on the rugs, with patterns proclaiming “NYPD,” “Made in Afghanistan,” and “Long live U.S. soldiers,” among others. These newer rugs tout American views, rather than Afghan ones, pointing to the conclusion that they are woven only with the intent to sell.

However, other scholars point to political motivations behind the creation of war rugs as well. The rugs serve as vehicles for expressing Afghan identity and its changing meaning in a world of globalization and a country filled with outsiders. Their memorialization of Afghanistan's history is a way to preserve their past and their culture during times of upheaval. Portrayals of landscapes and well-known locations, such as the Friday Mosque in the city of Herat, operate in this way. They romanticize a peacetime Afghanistan, be it a wistful remembrance of the past or an ardent hope for the future.

Certain rugs also serve as commentaries of specific political events, especially those concerning the Soviet retreat. A subgenre of war rugs, which emerged in 1989, pictures retreating Soviet forces, with tanks, planes, and helicopters shown fleeing north. The glorification of armies is another common topic. In addition to the American soldiers on post-2001 rugs, many commemorate the Northern Alliance, an Afghan anti-Taliban force, in what can be interpreted as a more genuine reflection of Afghan political views. Heroic portraits of various political figures, such as Ali ibn-Abi Talib, Amanullah Khan, and Ahmad Shah Massoud, speak to their popularity in Afghan culture. On the other hand, rugs with imagery condemning the USSR's installed leader in Afghanistan, Najibullah, reflect his infamy.

Reasons closer to the weavers' personal struggles may be located alongside the far-reaching political implications of the designs. The changes in the traditional art form are in some part simply a natural result of the dramatic changes to the environment in which Afghans live. The Stinger, the weapon that proved instrumental in the defeat of the Soviet Union, along with the Russian Kalashnikov and the American AK-47, have become common motifs on rugs because they are common sights in Afghan life. Mujahideen leader Sayed Ahmad Gailani, speaking in 1988, described the war rugs as embodiments of the trauma inflicted on the Afghan people by the war:

A terrible violation of my country has taken place. A whole generation grew up knowing nothing besides the war. All they know how to do is fight. Think of the beautiful Afghan rugs for which my country is famous. Even as recently as 10 years ago, people embroidered them with pyramids and camels. But today there are only tanks, military planes, and bombers.

Taking all such evidence into consideration, there is most certainly a give and take among the various reasons given by experts and enthusiasts for this curious phenomenon. It is possible for Afghan weavers to have a dual purpose in their work—both making a living and making a statement.

Photography in Afghanistan



Felix Cadman

A Taliban member with an AK-47, a woman in a blue hijab walking in the ruined streets of Kabul, U.S. soldiers standing guard: these all are frequent and familiar photographic images of Afghanistan in the international media. But are these images the only photographs of Afghanistan? If not, then why are these particular pictures the only ones typically shown? These questions can be answered by tracing the history of Afghanistan's photographic representation through its 35 years of conflict and by comparing how the foreign press represents Afghanistan; that is, comparing the images we typically see with the photographs taken by contemporary Afghan photographers. Through this comparison, it becomes clear why different images of Afghanistan have come about and what these images mean to their respective audiences.

Most of the images during the Soviet invasion documented the Russian soldiers and the mujahideen fighters. There were no known Afghan photographers during this time, probably due to the mass exodus of the population. Those Afghans remaining were either fighting in the war or trying to produce food and other vital resources. During this era, there were a few notable foreign photojournalists, such as Americans Edward Grazda and Steve McCurry. Grazda is an experienced photographer whose work documents the daily lives of the Afghan people. McCurry is interested in instilling an emotional connection from his audience to his subjects by capturing the "beautiful suffering," to use a phrase coined by the Williams College Museum of Art in an exhibit of the same title, found in war-torn places such as Afghanistan. This idea is profoundly articulated in his widely recognized *National Geographic* image, *Afghan Girl*. Sharbat Gula, the young woman portrayed, is a suffering refugee, but the most striking aspect of the photograph is her piercing eyes and beautiful face. The image has been likened to that of a fashion model. The portrait's popularity suggests that the audience for such photographs, a primarily American and European one, is more responsive to images that tell a painful yet beautiful story than Grazda's ones of everyday life occurring in the same time frame.

The Taliban's reign from 1996 to 2001 brought with it, for a short time, a small sense of stability in Afghanistan, but in exchange the Taliban enacted harsh laws in an attempt to control the people. Photographic practices in Afghanistan were almost nonexistent during these five years, with only a few photojournalists like Grazda managing to sneak in and capture events. By the Taliban's last year, the practice was almost completely dead.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. military entered the scene. With the unofficial ban on photography lifted and worldwide interest in the U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, an explosion of new images and photographers emerged. During the past 12 years, the images that reach an American audience with the greatest frequency are from the U.S. and NATO military as well as foreign press journalists. It is from these groups that the familiar images of burqa-clad



Rada Akbar

Colorful Life, 2012

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

women, soldiers, guns, and ruined streets appear. These photographs show only a fraction of life in Afghanistan, yet these are the images that have most heavily shaped Western perceptions of Afghanistan.

After the U.S. invasion, Afghans started producing photographs of their country. The Afghanistan depicted by Afghans is different than that presented by foreign photographers. Two groups of Afghans are part of this new wave of photography: returning refugees and young, up-and-coming artists and journalists in Afghanistan's urban areas. Zalmai is perhaps the most well-known and influential photographer of the refugee group. Believing that military action and downtrodden people are too often the focus of photographs of Afghanistan, Zalmai wishes to capture the joy of life he sees in the new generation of Afghans.

With the advent of camera phones, photography is no longer limited to the professionals. This is significant in Afghanistan, where the news media really only captures one side of the story. Still, professional photography also is growing in the cities, and these new photographers provide an exciting opportunity for people to see a different Afghanistan. The Afghan Photography Network is a collective of more than 30 Afghan photographers, each of whom captures his or her own vision of the country. Guns and rubble are a part of this vision, but so are balloons, bodybuilding, and doves.

Transnational Afghan Artists: Mariam Ghani, Aman Mojadidi, and Lida Abdul



Lee West

The contemporary artists Mariam Ghani, Aman Mojadidi, and Lida Abdul all utilize a variety of mediums (including but not limited to video, installation, mixed media, and performance) in order to push for a collective understanding of Afghanistan's history and possible future from the vantage point of the present. All three artists incorporate universal themes and operate between the spaces of geography, time, and identity. Like many transnational artists, all three have experienced literal and figurative displacement while living in a time of rapid globalization. Their postmodern approaches to challenging identity politics involve anthropology, ethnography, and personal experience. It is the combination of history and myth and of physical and psychological responses that contribute to a new perspective on Afghanistan during its current physical and cultural reconstruction.

Born in New York in 1978, Mariam Ghani grew up with parents of mixed cultural backgrounds: Lebanese and Afghan. The reactions among her American neighbors, friends, and contemporaries following September 11, 2001, engendered a significant change in Ghani's awareness of her Afghan identity. Ghani began to research Afghanistan's social, cultural, and political histories, subsequently developing a number of artistic and literary projects. Since then, Ghani has been awarded New York Foundation for the Arts and Soros fellowships. Her video, photography, and installation exhibitions and screenings have appeared at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, the CPH:DOX in Copenhagen, transmediale in Berlin, dOCUMENTA (13) in Kabul and Kassel, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the 2005 Liverpool Biennial, the Sharja Biennials 9 and 10, and the Tate Modern in London.

Ghani utilizes a research-based practice that often investigates places and moments that symbolize transitioning spaces. The works *Kabul 2,3,4* and *Selections* are part of a larger work called *Kabul: Partial Reconstructions* (2002–07). For five years Ghani documented postwar reconstruction in Kabul, recording the physical traces on the surface of the city, as well as the social and political reconstructions of the city. Each work gives a different perspective on the concept of transformation and reconstruction.

Aman Mojadidi was born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1971. In his artist's statement on his website, Mojadidi describes growing up between American and Afghan culture, experiencing a combination of foods, cultural values, and traditions. Given that his bicultural identity informs much of his work, it is perhaps not surprising that Mojadidi investigates cultural and political narratives as products of their environment. He has recently exhibited work in Vienna and Beirut, at art berlin contemporary, Galerie Utopia of Palais de Tokyo in Paris, dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel and Kabul, the Ft. Kochi/Muziris Biennale in Kerala, and Traffic Gallery in Dubai. His universal, often parodist, perspective reinterprets the intersections between cultures. *Love Letters from Home* addresses the

relationship between the state and its individual citizens, what roles each play, and what surfaces through this relationship.

Last, but certainly not least, is Lida Abdul. Born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1973, Abdul was a refugee in Germany and India before coming to study in the U.S. Abdul's physical and emotional displacement contributes to the subversion of identity within much of her work. Her recent work has been featured at the Venice Biennale 2005, Istanbul Modern, Kunsthalle Vienna, Museum of Modern Art Arnhem, Netherlands, Miami Central, CAC Centre d'Art Contemporain de Bretigny, and Frac Lorraine Metz, France. She has also exhibited in festivals in Mexico, Spain, Germany, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan. Abdul's work challenges the common and comfortable perspective of Afghanistan's cultural and physical history in order to reclaim the present. *In Transit* exemplifies this aesthetic confrontation with Afghanistan's history, overtly conceptualizing the relationship of the current state of the nation and the effects of prolonged war.

Post-conflict conditions allow previously disavowed aspects of Afghan history to be simultaneously consumed and revived. The work of these three artists pushes for an acknowledgement of Afghanistan's fractured past to an international audience that, more often than not, oversimplifies the country's history and cultural identity. Each of their work differs in approach, method, and style, yet, no matter the artistic form, their work forces the viewer to contemplate the universal aspects of identity and memory. Indeed, the works included in this exhibition locate displaced memories and address the (re)construction of both identity and the physical environment. By blending documentation and imagination, these artists track the physical and emotional changes that for decades have rocked Afghanistan, leaving its citizens in a state of continuous displacement and radical transition.



Mariam Ghani

Kabul 2, 3, 4, 2002–07

Three-channel video installation

Each video, 13:00 min.

Courtesy of the artist

Checklist of the Exhibition



Lida Abdul

b. 1973, in Kabul; resides in Los Angeles



In Transit, 2008

Single-channel video

4:55 min.

Courtesy of the artist and Giorgio Persano Gallery, Turin

Rada Akbar

b. 1988, in Afghanistan; resides in Kabul



Collecting Wool Threads to Be Dyed for Carpets, Kabul, 2012

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Colorful Life, 2012

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Heroin Addicts in the Ruins of the Old Russian Cultural House, Kabul, 2009

Digital black-and-white print

Courtesy of the artist



School in Tent Settlement, Kabul, 2012

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Tent Settlement, Kabul, 2012

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist



Aftermath of Attack on U.S. Soldiers in Faryab, 2012

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Female Journalist, 2006

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Qasem Foushanji

b. 1987, in Herat; resides in Kabul

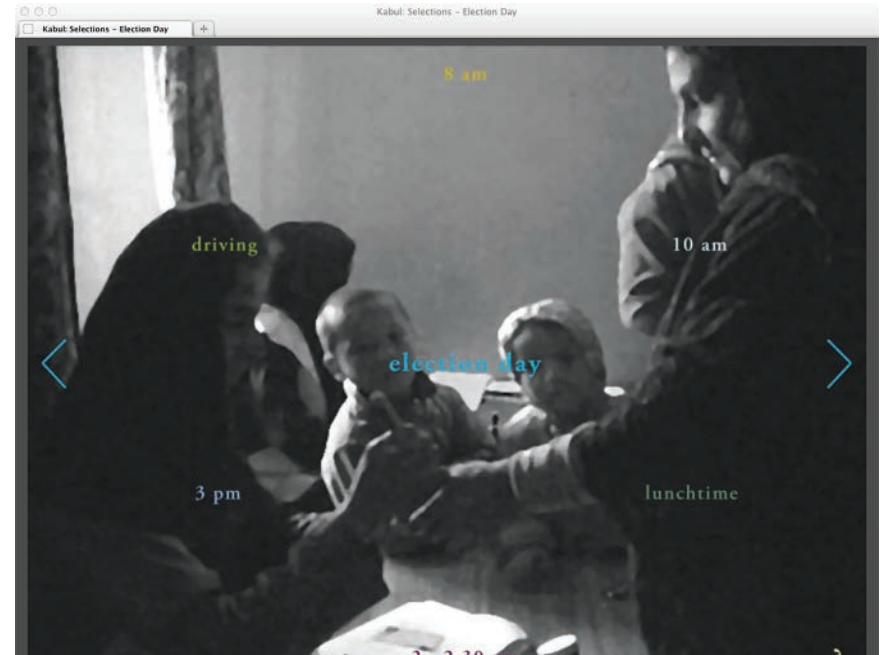


Melting Words, 2, 2012

Oil on paper
20 3/4 x 14 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Mariam Ghani

b. 1978, in New York; resides in New York



Kabul: Selections, 2006–07

Video installation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Kabul 2, 3, 4, 2002–07

Three-channel video installation
Each video, 13:00 min.
Courtesy of the artist

Moshtari Hilal



b. 1993, in Kabul; resides in Hamburg, Germany



Catch Me If You Can, 2013

Ink on paper

16 ½ x 11 ¾ in.

Courtesy of the artist

Amanullah Khan, 2013

Ink on paper

16 ½ x 11 ¾ in.

Courtesy of the artist

Antique Mujahideen, 2013

Ink on paper

16 ½ x 11 ¾ in.

Courtesy of the artist

Shot to the Head, 2013

Ink on paper; 16 ½ x 11 ¾ in.

Courtesy of the artist

Mariam Nabil Kamal



b. 1988, in Kabul; resides in Kabul



The Sound of the Footsteps, 2010

Documentary video

Filmed at the Ali Abad Rehabilitation Centre, Kabul

18:00 min.

Courtesy of Atelier Varan Kabul

Mohammad Aref Karimi



b. 1985, in Herat; resides in Herat



An Employee of the Jihad Museum, Herat, in a Diorama of the Mujahideen War Against the Soviet Union, 2012

Digital color photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Prayer at the Great Mosque of Herat during the Islamic Holy Month of Ramadan, 2012

Digital color photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Afghan Youths Learning to Paint at the Behzad Art Gallery, Herat, 2012

Digital color photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Donkey Ride on the Outskirts of Herat, 2012

Digital color photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Former Taliban Fighters Display Their Weapons as They Join Afghan Government Forces, Herat Province, 2012

Digital color photograph
Courtesy of the artist

'Jelabi' (Sweet) Factory Before the Islamic Holy Month of Ramadan, Herat, 2013

Digital color photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Zahra Orna Kazemi



b. 1993, in Mashhad, Iran; resides in Kabul



Untitled, 2013

Watercolor, pen and ink, and hand printing on book cover
11 ½ x 7 ½ in.
Courtesy of the artist

Untitled, 2013

Watercolor, pen and ink, and hand printing on wasli paper
13 ¾ x 9 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Untitled, 2013

Watercolor, pen and ink, and hand printing on wasli paper
13 ¾ x 15 ¼ in.
Courtesy of the artist



From: "Kabul, USConsul" <USConsulKabul@state.gov>
Subject: Warden Message: Nowroz Advisory
Date: March 19, 2011 4:36:42 PM GMT+04:30
To: "Kabul, USConsul" <USConsulKabul@state.gov>

**Warden Message
U.S. Embassy Kabul
Nowroz Advisory**

Nowroz, the Afghan New Year, is on Monday, March 21, 2011. This important Afghan holiday brings large numbers of people to popular places. Mazar-e-Sharif is a top Nowroz destination, as well as gathering places in Kabul and other locations in Afghanistan. Such large-scale gatherings may become targets for violent extremists.

Due to this fact, the U.S. Embassy has restricted the travel of its employees in Kabul from Sunday, March 20 through Wednesday, March 23, 2011 and in Mazar-e-Sharif from late Friday, March 18 to Wednesday, March 23, 2011.

The Embassy would also like to take this opportunity to remind U.S. citizens of its Security Announcements Internet web page, located at http://kabul.usembassy.gov/security_announcements.html.

U.S. citizens in Afghanistan should regularly monitor the [Embassy's website](http://kabul.usembassy.gov) (<http://kabul.usembassy.gov>), and the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs website, where [Country Specific Information](#) and the [Travel Warning](#) for Afghanistan are found. In addition, the Embassy encourages U.S. citizens to review "A Safe Trip Ahead," which includes valuable security information for those traveling or living in foreign countries. The Embassy also encourages U.S. citizens to sign up for the Department's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#), which will allow the Consular Section to better assist you in the event of an emergency.

The [U.S. Embassy](#) is located at Great Masood Road between Radio Afghanistan and the Ministry of Public Health in Kabul. To reach the American Citizens Services unit during business hours, please call 0700-108-499 or send us an [e-mail](mailto:USConsulKabul@state.gov) (USConsulKabul@state.gov). You can also reach us through the Embassy's switchboard by calling 0700-108-001/002. For after-hours emergencies involving U.S. citizens, please call the Consular Duty Officer at 0700-201-908.

Sincerely,
Consular Section
U.S. Embassy Kabul

The email is UNCLASSIFIED.

Love Letters from Home, 2011

Installation with paper, ink, binder clips, and audio

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist



River and Village of Aziz Khan, Laghman Province, 2007

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Kabul City, 2007

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Rahraw Omarzad



b. 1964, in Kabul; resides in Kabul



The Third One (Opening), 2005

Video

11:31 min.

Courtesy of the artist

Abdullah Shayagan



b. 1990, in Bamiyan Province; resides in Bamiyan



Funeral Ceremony for Jawad Zahak, Head of the Bamiyan Provincial Council, 2011

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Cultivating Potatoes, Old City of Bamiyan in the Background, c. 2011–12

Digital color photograph

Courtesy of the artist

Zolaykha Sherzad

b. 1967, in Kabul; resides in New York City



Hawa-e-Azad (Free Space), 2009

Silk-screen calligraphy on silk with fiberglass structure and wood
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Homage to "Bedel," 2010
Handwoven silk with black calligraphy,
silk-screened with the poem of Abdul Qader Bedel
Courtesy of the artist

Amin Taasha

b. 1993, in Bamiyan Province; resides in Kabul



Silence, 2013

Watercolor and hand printing on cardboard
9 ¼ x 30 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, Paris

Silence, 2013

Watercolor and hand printing on cardboard
14 x 33 ¼ in.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, Paris

Silence, 2013

Watercolor and hand printing on cardboard
13 ¼ x 32 ½ in.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, Paris



Untitled Miniature, Kala Minar Series, 2013

Mixed media on paper

13 3/4 x 10 1/2 in.

Courtesy of Theca Gallery, Lugano

Untitled Miniature, Kala Minar Series, 2013

Mixed media on paper

11 3/4 x 15 1/4 in.

Courtesy of Theca Gallery, Lugano

Untitled Miniature, Kala Minar Series, 2013

Mixed media on paper

11 3/4 x 15 1/2 in.

Courtesy of Theca Gallery, Lugano



Afghan Map War Rug, mid-1980s

Knotted pile, wool on cotton

29 x 39 in.

Courtesy WarRug.com

"Do Not Touch War Rug," 2000

Knotted pile, wool on wool

39 x 79 in.

Courtesy WarRug.com

Najibullah Rug, late 1990s

Knotted pile, wool on cotton

40 x 56 in.

Courtesy WarRug.com

Rustam and the White Div, 1980s

Knotted pile, wool on wool

49 x 75 in.

Courtesy WarRug.com

Specular Mosque Rug with Vehicle Border, early 1980s

Knotted pile, wool on wool

70 x 52 in.

Courtesy WarRug.com

Baluch War Rug, late 1980s

Knotted pile, wool on wool

34 x 53 in.

Loaned by Lois Fichner-Rathus



Jamila
Hand-Embroidered Scarf (detail), 2008
 Silk thread on rayon cotton
 18 x 90 in.
 Courtesy of Kandahar Treasure

Sardar Khanum
Jala-doozi, 2010
 Silk thread on rayon cotton, 10 x 60 in.
 Courtesy of Kandahar Treasure

Hand-Embroidered Women's and Men's Clothing and Scarves, 2003–13
 Courtesy of Kandahar Treasure



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