

# apexart

2016-17 Unsolicited Program Proposal

Proposal Submitted by:

**Rabbya Naseer**

from Lahore, Pakistan

## *Promises to Keep*

I am an artist, art teacher, curator and writer from Pakistan, who has a particular interest in performance art as a tool or medium for making, understanding and writing about art. I have spent the last 5 years fighting (and finally succeeding) to make performance art; a taught discipline at their school of visual arts.

Performance art is still a very rare medium that is showcased in art galleries in Pakistan, but despite that, a lot of young artists are employing the medium to articulate their ideas. Most of these artists happen to be women.

Why they happen to be women, what are the similarities and differences between this medium's history in Pakistan and its history in the west, why most of the performative works are for the camera (with very few live performances), e.t.c are all questions that I started to engage with, during my masters dissertation (at School of Art Institute Chicago), titled; 'promises to keep'. Hence, this exhibition is a continuation of that dissertation that has matured with the passing years of teaching, writing, making and curating of art.

The exhibition will explore the use of artist's body/presence in acts of self-representation by 10 female artists from Pakistan, whose works addresses the performative relationship between autobiography and self-portraiture in relation to "identity".

These works explore the possibilities for a pro-active engagement with the socio-political issues, reconfiguring the status and function of art from passivity to active agency and direct confrontation, mapping connections between senses of the self and its representations in popular culture. Also marking the beginning of an engagement with performative art practice that had not yet been written or talked about in the Pakistani art circles. The exhibition will look at how self-parody, activism, nationalism, popular culture and feminism cross paths in these enactments to elucidate the autobiographical presentation of the subject within social domains through simplified representations that often function as punch lines addressed to the populace, to explore the possibilities for art to intervene in humanitarian crisis through a language related easily to the common language of the streets. Dissolving the distinctions between high and low art, social and artistic hierarchies, this approach to art making develops innovative strategies for narrating the need for a "social responsibility".

Reflecting upon the self while analyzing the reality of their own fiction, these artists, through the use of self-parody, challenge the notions of prescribed identities. In the presentation of their naïve and ironic ignorance, underlies a stern disapproval to comply. The use of humor well suited for open condemnation, revisits the past in order to recognize the present. These apparent reproductions of what is and has always been are actually playfully derisive retellings of an old story, told much frequently. They do not attempt to describe themselves, but encourage a dialogue about the definition of selfhood, questioning the validity of the self and challenging prescribed notions about identities, nevertheless rendering their authority and emphasizing the weakness of the parodied. Their ability to reflect critically.