

22/07/22 — 14/09/22

# YOUR TONGUE IN MY MOUTH HUMA MULJI

Immediately after independence in August 1947, the government of Pakistan began the long process that would, over the next few decades, modify street names, discard memorials, reshape cultural markers, revise school textbooks, weekends, architecture, law and language. To heal the deep wounds of partition, and in a hurry to distance itself from anything unIslamic, centuries of syncretic cultural and religious rituals were slowly stripped away, eroded and transformed in collective memory.

In 1962, Ayub Khan's military government dismantled 'Malika Victoria', dispersing the many components of the memorial to the Imperial Queen, which eventually found their way across the city. The marble and bronze monument was originally commissioned to the sculptor Sir Hamo Thornycroft, and inaugurated in 1906, by George the V at Frere Hall, Karachi.

Growing up in Karachi, Mulji navigated her way between the disembodied heads and limbs of discarded statues, in the back corridors of Mohatta Palace, then the abandoned former home of Fatimah Jinnah. In an article in *The Herald* magazine from 1994, she came across a vivid description of a pedestal outside the Karachi Municipal Corporation Headquarters. Like any city bench, it was found variously occupied by loungers, eating or waiting; cats devouring leftover food and crows and kites swooping down, after the last morsels. No one knew or cared that this was the plinth where once stood an imposing marble statue of the former Empress of India.

This year, the artist journeyed back to Karachi to find this plinth. In the process, stumbling upon other fragments of the memorial. The body of resulting work presented here centres on collective memory, time, place and belonging; complicating accepted historical linearity, placing two worlds in parallel entanglement, taking the viewer to glimpse geographies other than their own and to re-read illegible stories.

The film work *Gandhi Garden* depicts a pair of bronze lions that once flanked the Queen's statue and now sit in Karachi Zoo whereby a restless present plays out around them.

*Red Carpet* is a re-staging of the inauguration of the Victoria Memorial at Frere Hall. The image taken from the Archive of Sculptors' Papers at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, serves as a backdrop to the exhibition, abraded to leave the ceremonial red carpet as the lasting legacy.

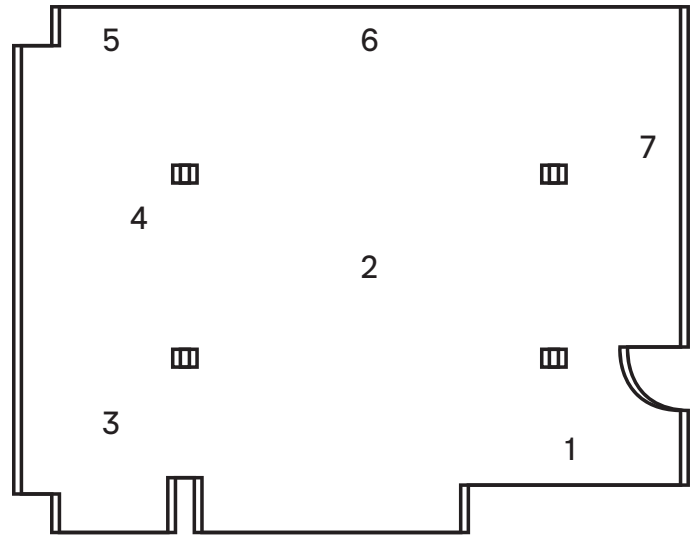
*The Karachi Star* (titled after a Victorian mosaic pattern called The Star of Karachi) reveals the void left by the footprint of the lost plinth of the Queen Victoria Statue, and *Rumour* tells the tale of the Queen's nose, lost during the rushed relocation.

The marble statue continues to live in the back of the Mohatta Palace Museum, covered in dust, partly concealed as though swallowed by the city's abundant *Bougainvillea spectabilis* (locally known as bogan-bail) and *Cestrum Nocturnum* (Raat ki Rani), with a prohibition on photography. In the exhibition, the photographic work *Raat ki Rani* (Queen of the Night) is propped casually, emitting a dull scent of this fragrant night blooming plant, bringing distant geographies home.

The film *Your Tongue in My Mouth* is a portrait of Bilal Sahab, a roadside notary, who types gift deeds, personal wills and letters to the editors of English newspapers on behalf of Karachi's citizens. Sharing the title of the exhibition, the film alludes to the complex relationship between language and interpretation, that which is lost and that which is evoked. The title of the exhibition is itself both erotic and intrusive, with desire and repulsion simultaneously at play. It suggests violence and discomfort alluding to Pakistan's complicated relationship with its past; and how that history plays out in the present.

Mulji brings together this fragmented architecture, obscured by a collective forgetting and a narrative where the city is the only protagonist.

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**1.**  
*Red Carpet*  
2022  
Abraded Inkjet Printed on  
Hewlett Packard Standard  
Smooth Wallpaper 175gsm  
326 x 680 cm

**2.**  
*The Karachi Star*  
2022  
Cement Mosaic Tiles  
300 x 300 x 1.6 cm

**3.**  
*Your Tongue in My Mouth*  
2022  
Three Channel video  
7 mins  
Credits: Bilal Khateeb (Typist)  
Huma Mulji, Ali Rizvi (Camera)  
Oliver Sutherland (Editing)

**4.**  
*Raat Ki Rani*  
2022  
Giclée Print on Innova  
Photrag 310 gsm, and  
Mixed Media on Plywood  
247 x 113 x 5 cm

**5.**  
*Rumour*  
2022  
Mixed Media on Carved Marble  
12 x 9 x 6 cm

**6.**  
*Gandhi Garden*  
2022  
Double Channel Video  
16. 42 mins  
Credits: Huma Mulji, Ali  
Rizvi (Camera) Oliver  
Sutherland (Editing)

**7.**  
*Postcards*  
2022  
Digital Print on Silk  
Stock 300gsm  
10.5 x 14.8 cm

## SOUTH WEST SHOWCASE

Huma Mulji is one of two artists selected for The South West Showcase 2022. SWS is a recurring open call platform (est. 2013), showcasing artists from across the South West region.

The showcase aims to support artists working and living in the South West through a year-long programme of mentoring and support with an exhibition outcome; presenting a long-term commitment to profiling and supporting the practises of artists in this region.

With thanks to UWE for their generous support with the production of *The Karachi Star* and *Red Carpet*, and Mosaic Factory, for their valuable collaboration and help with producing *The Karachi Star*.



## BIOGRAPHY

Mulji's work centres on observing the everyday within urban geographies, particularly across South Asia. She is interested in telling the story of a nebulous combination of the dysfunctional, the heroic, the sorrowful and the resilient.

Mulji works across media, with a focus on sculpture, installation and photography. Huma Mulji is based in Bristol with a studio at Spike Island. Alongside her practice she teaches BA (Hons) Fine Art, at UWE Bristol, and previously at Arts University Plymouth. She is represented by Project88, Mumbai.

[www.humamulji.com](http://www.humamulji.com)

MIRROR



MIRROR  
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Mon-Friday:  
9am—5pm  
Saturday:  
9am—2pm

Opening times are  
subject to change

For more information  
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MIRROR is a public gallery, events programme and online resource supported within Arts University Plymouth. MIRROR commissions new work and produces exhibitions, events, residencies, research and student-led projects, with a specific focus on enriching the careers of artists based within the South West region.

Our free public gallery is open to everyone to visit and we look forward to welcoming you to our space.