

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Analysis of Abid Husain Qureshi's Art

Dr. Wardah Naeem Bukhari, Assistant Professor, Department of Graphic Design, Lahore College for Women University Lahore, Pakistan. Email: wardah.naeem@lcwu.edu.pk

Dr. Muhammad Asghar (Corresponding Author), Associate Professor/Director, Institute of Art & Design, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. Email: asghar@gcuf.edu.pk

Dr. Munazza Rashid, Assistant Professor, University of Home Economics Lahore, Pakistan. Email: dr.munazzarashid.ad@uhe.edu.pk

Mirza Mohsin Latif, Lecturer, Institute of Art & Design, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. Email: mirzamohsinlatif@gmail.com

Baneen Nazir, Lecturer, Institute of Art & Design, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. Email: baneen.nazir@gmail.com

Abstract

Figurative art has historically been a trendy subject among Pakistani artists. Abid Husain Qureshi, on the other hand, has concentrated especially on human sorrow and loss from a variety of perspectives, which provides us with views into Pakistan's whole past and history. He has also researched human psychology and its intricacies. His paintings are enhanced by the way he arranges the materials to represent the subject matter best. To emphasize the meaning of the subject matter even more, he also used color.

Therefore, the current paper's goal is to examine and thoroughly analyze all the artwork that Qureshi created during his life. This study's method is based on both intrinsic and extrinsic analysis. It will pay special attention to its aesthetics and underlying philosophical ideas, which have shaped his entire body of work.

Key Words: *Figurative art, Pakistani artist, human psychology, intrinsic and extrinsic analysis, philosophical ideas.*

Introduction:

On January 16, 1946, Abid Husain Qureshi was born in Lahore. He obtained his master's degree in fine arts from the University of Punjab in 1968 after graduating with a B.A. in fine arts from Government College in Lahore in 1966. With a Japanese Government Scholarship (Mombusho Scholarship), he traveled to Japan in 1970. In 1973, he was awarded a second Master of Fine Arts degree in oil painting by the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in Japan. Then, from 1973 to 1975, he earned his M.F.A. in Mural Arts from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. From 1976 to 1984, he worked as a medical embryologist at St. Marianna Medical University in Kawasaki, Japan. He studied human anatomy and internal organs at St. Marianna Medical University in Kawasaki, Japan from 1979 to 1980, during which time he dissected human cadavers nonstop for two years. He is both a scientist and an artist. He wrote a lengthy treatise on the topic of "fertilization" during this time. "Neuroendocrinological control on the fertilization of Rat, with control as Human" is the subject matter. As a scientist, he is working on a complex study of the organ systems that develop in rat fetuses, which is Qureshi's research topic. He conducted a collaborative study on chick embryos at St. Marianna University, which was published in the school magazine in 1978 (Naveed, 2001).

He went back to Pakistan in 1984 and worked as a teacher at PUCAD, NCA, Lahore, UoB at Quetta, BZU at Multan, and eventually the University of Sargodha. As an artist, he has participated in numerous group shows both domestically and abroad, in addition to 10 solo exhibitions, seven of which have focused on the theme of existentialism. He is an expert in stone carving, marble chiseling, and clay modeling as a sculptor. He is an accomplished painter who has over twelve different painting styles under his command, including pastel, poster, acrylic, mosaic, fresco, egg, oil, and marker painting.

The four distinct phases of Abid Husain Qureshi's work can be distinguished from one another. Realism is linked to the first phase, semi-surrealism to the second, knowledge and wisdom to the third, and existentialism to the fourth. This study will focus on these four phases and the symbols he employed, using samples from some of his most well-known works.

1. Realism Phase

Since Mrs. Ana Molka Ahmad oversees the P.U. CAD program, which is built on rigorous academicism, Qureshi's art instruction is also predicated on immaculate academicism. He was exceptionally skilled at using realism principles there, which allowed him to translate a three-dimensional object onto a two-dimensional canvas surface. His mastery of tonal quality and tonal gradation is notably apparent in two works from 1968, "The Burial" and "Portrait of an Old Man," which demonstrate this ability throughout his P.U. CAD studies. The majority of the subject matter consisted of pictures of the department's professional models and impoverished employees. In addition to focusing on figure composition, Qureshi painted several significant subjects, including children swimming in a pool, watermelon eaters, and funerals. Based on academic principles, the style of each of these paintings is harsh realism. There was still no elongation or stylization (Mehmood, 1991).

1.1 Symbols in the Realism Phase

In his works, some symbols had surfaced around this time. A hand axe represents a grave; a water pitcher represents a man who is still alive; and a broken water pitcher represents a man who has passed away. In Qureshi's life, these three symbols have together shown up frequently anytime he has drawn the theme of death. For instance, he painted the natural calamity, the hunger, and the funerals at various points in his life, yet each has the same symbol of death (H.S, 1968).



Figure 1: Qureshi, *The Burial*, 3 by 5 feet, oil paint on canvas, 2024. (Used with permission)

1.1.1 The Burial

The painting's dark, dismal colors go well with the theme of death. These are mostly greys, greenish-black, dark brown, and ocher tones. The coffin's white fabric gleams among them in a peculiar way. As its coffin glimmers, we may sense that the departed, despite their poverty, exhibits purity and sacredness. The pyramidal composition creates tiny triangles throughout the entire artwork. People's sorrowful faces and attitudes convey their deep suffering. The baby, whose face is screaming and covered in nails, is sinking into the foreground and grabbing the ground with his fingers while also wonderfully capturing the painting's theme and composition. Additionally, it is astounding and admirable how the artist used several color levels to convey a sense of spaciousness. The grave's extreme foreground has the thickest texture, while the grave's extreme background has a smoother, smaller texture and a thinner texture on the opposite side of the grave. The sensation of distance that he expertly created is conveyed by these variances in texture. Additionally, he has chosen the exact moment of the day that the sun sets, which represents the end of the day or the end of life. To provide more monumentality and impact to the composition, two enormous women stand up next to the grave. One of them made the customary Muslim gesture of raising her arm above the divine to express, in words unspoken, "Oh God, what has happened." The observer's psyche is troubled by unusual impressions, reminding them that the hand axe and water pitcher stand for death.

1.2 Semi Surrealism Phase

There was an element of surrealism and an elongation in the figures during his first visit to Tokyo Gai Dai (1972–1973). He painted seven works of art on human misery and troubles, focusing especially on the human figure because this was the theme of his research. These were referred to as "natural disasters," "the last human," "reincarnation," "tranquility and peace," "where are you," and "famine." This is also the period in which his artwork began to gradually reveal the sun's sign. Traditionally, the Sun was revered as God by the Japanese. Japan is still home to a small portion of this faith. It makes sense that this symbol and the Japanese sun had an impact on Qureshi's work. His painting style and method underwent a radical transformation at Gai Dai. He used to blend colors on a pellet at P.U. CAD and then apply the precise shade and color on the canvas. However, his mentor Nakane Hiroshi in Japan instructed him to apply each color layer by layer on the canvas without sacrificing the freshness of the color to achieve the precise color and tone he desired. Three or four thin color washes were done in this manner. Qureshi had carried on using this method all of his life and even now (Nizama Talib, 1993).

1.2.1 Symbols in the Semi Surrealism Phase

A big tree is a representation of both divine power and protection, like an umbrella. Reaching for divinity is symbolized by the transcendental tree, which spreads its branches straight up into the sky and spreads its pathways across the land. A woman tending to her deceased kid represents genocide. A youngster giving her mother an embrace represents ultimate achievement and hope. During his semi-surrealist phase, Qureshi also employed symbols such as trees, cults, space, circles, planets, the sun, and occasionally the earth (Gulzar Afaqi, 1988).



Figure 2: Qureshi, The Potential Rose, 3 by 4 feet, oil paint on canvas, 2024. (Used with permission)

1.2.2 The Potential Rose

As this phase came about immediately after the realism phase, the painting was only somewhat affected by

the semi-surrealist movement, rather than completely submerged in it. Because of this, we can still sense that realism is present in some of his canvases even at this point in his growth. Though the work has a dreamlike quality overall, his enduring realism is still apparent in the extended forms. What gives it a surrealistic quality is this. Roses are another well-known and well-acknowledged sign of extraordinary happiness in Qureshi's paintings. A bliss that is currently just in its potential form but will eventually manifest in actuality is what "the potential rose" promises to bring about. The mother's raising of her arms above her head and the way her hands form a bowl suggest that she will have some delight following the blessing, which is symbolized by the spilled flow. It is quite obvious that the mother is expecting a kid, and the possibility of a rose represents the incredible joy that will accompany the child's birth. The wisdom that was passed down to Adam's successors is represented by the same transcendental tree in the center, its barren branches reaching toward the sky. The man lying in the background in a state of peaceful relaxation represents the tranquility that humanity was experiencing at the time. The potential rose in the center reveals the unborn child. The unborn child is revealed by a potential rose in the center. Fertility is indicated by the roots that permeate and cover the soil. Again, Qureshi's composition is monumental; the predominant lines in his paintings usually imply and make a shape and form of the subject matter. The colors in this painting depict the time of dusk just before the sunset when on every object a reddish-gold hue of light falls a mauve purplish shadow. He primarily used reddish and blue tones with tonal shifts to create a style that was closer to semi-surrealistic and had a dreamlike aspect. His use of cold and warm hues produces a composition with strong contrast and visual hierarchy. This painting is seen to be symmetrical and technically balanced, which strengthens the painting's subject matter.

1.3 Knowledge and Wisdom Phase

In Japan from 1975 until 1984, he underwent another stay, this time changing his focus from surrealism to knowledge and wisdom. He started to take on a dreamlike, surrealistic, and more symbolic tone. He claimed that the ten paintings he created during this period, which focused on knowledge and wisdom, were the outcome of ten insights that he had from time to time. He also wrote down these verbal descriptions of his visions. In his book "The Ten Revelations of Wisdom," which he released later in Pakistan in 1986, these artworks were displayed alongside the revelations. Here, Qureshi's paintings, are where the sun, sky, cliff, and ocean symbols first appeared. During this era, he produced eleven paintings that he labeled Knowledge a bequest of the descendants of Adam, Wisdom in Revelation, The Wonderful Virtue of Knowledge, That Terrible or Deal, The Grand Traditions of Islam, This Falling Precipice of Japan, Genocide and state powers, or In the name of God, there is a place without justice that is getting closer (Afaqi, 1987).

Enlightenment, or wisdom, is the immoral aspect of human potential that can be recognized via perception, cognition, imitation, education, and knowledge. God has given every human being the quality of wisdom as a Divine Gift, enabling them to grow in intelligence and make wise use of their knowledge. Wisdom is the mental force acting in the most efficient manner on the entity that the highest knowledge can create. The core of knowledge is wisdom. The moment of revelation is the highest moment of wisdom. In revelation, wisdom is like a light that illuminates every planet, every universe, and every world. In revelation, wisdom is a gift from God. In revelation, wisdom is like a sun that is illuminated and has the superior light of knowledge at its core. Divine Words and this Divine Power, illuminated with the Divine Virtues, constitute wisdom in revelation (Khawaja Naveed, 2001).

1.3.1 Symbols in Knowledge and Wisdom Phase

According to the artist, an ecliptic sun represents the ignorance that has plastered its shadow on the sun, while a sparkling sun with brilliant colors and lovely beams is a sign of knowledge and wisdom. Nonetheless, the sun's repressed light is still visible as the corona, which is a ring of light that surrounds the disc during ecliptic times. The sky rarely seems to be ordinary in its typical color in Qureshi's paintings. In all of his paintings, the sky has a symbolic philosophical, and theological importance. Whenever a terrible act occurs, it is always the metaphorical sky in its symbolic colors. It can also represent blessings, wisdom, and prosperity at times. In the case of Qureshi, cliffs stand for magnificent and wonderful traditions. It is a testament to the survival of great traditions when it is majestic, bright, and lofty. It is a sign that the country has lost its great traditions when anything crumbles, collapses, or drowns in the ocean. Qureshi's paintings of the ocean have two

meanings. In addition to being a sign of life, it also represents death. Every living thing derives its life force from the water, which simultaneously sucks everything whole (Sultan J. Qureshi, 1995).



Figure 3: Qureshi, *The miraculous virtue of knowledge*, 3 by 4 feet, oil paint on canvas, 2024. (Used with permission)

1.3.2 The miracles mystery of knowledge

It is this amazing fact that is the eternal, immortal, virtuous entity of knowledge, a miraculous mystery itself, and the true essence of life that turns time into eternal form. Knowledge is like the moon, which appears tiny but contains an enormous amount of light; it seems to exist in the water but does not get wet or immersed; it bestows light but does not lose its glow; in a shining situation, it illuminates the world; in an ecliptic situation, it reveals its oppressed light in the form of a corona in the ring of light that surrounds the disc, which suffers calmly during an eclipse and afterwards glitters brightly. Surah Al Imam, "The Reward," in the Quran states: "Can such a person who was lifeless and then Allah gave him life and gave him such light that we possessing that mysterious knowledge moves among the people, be similar to the owe whose position is that she is in the darkness (of ignorance) and who is not able to be out of those darkness's; it is in this way that non-believers come to know about their unkind deeds (122)."

1.4 Existentialism Phase

He pursued mural painting studies in Paris after earning his M.F.A. in 1973. His method of applying color in layers upon layers—which he had perfected in Japan persisted throughout his stay in Paris. Painting "Time and Space" during this time, he employed this technique. Qureshi's viewpoint does not entirely align or follow Sartre's line of thought. Qureshi asserts that the essence is older than existence and that it is predetermined even before a child is born, in contrast to Sartre's belief that existence is older than the essence. In 1987, Qureshi held his first solo exhibition on existentialism at the art gallery of PNCA, Islamabad, three years after coming home in 1984. Following that exhibition, there were six more consecutive solo exhibitions in Tehran, Quetta, and Lahore. While they used different angles and notions, they all adhered to the same ideology. "That Potential Rose," "Imposition and dominance," "Universe and leaves," "Advancement," "Commitment," and "Alienation" are a few of the striking paintings among them (Shahid, 1992).

1.4.1 Symbols in the Existentialism Phase

In Qureshi's artwork, the circle recurs during this phase of subjects other than the sun, earth, or other plants. The circle represents the concept of infinity, which has no beginning and no end. A universal symbol, the circle represents everything on Earth, the entire universe, and everything in between. Additionally, Qureshi has employed it in a variety of contexts and meanings. An exquisitely colored rose represents unimaginable joy. A rosebud is a symbol of a child that is yet unborn. Times have been represented by leaves. A group of leaves combined to resemble a flying creature is a representation of time passing (Bureau Report, 1988).



Figure 4: Qureshi, Time and Space, 26 feet by 6.5 feet, oil paint on canvas, 2024. (Used with permission)

1.4.2 Time and space: Concluding Remarks

The philosophical quest for realities related to life is known as existentialism. In this regard, he states, "I take a slightly surrealist approach even when rendering objects." As long as it flows naturally, I have no problem being a surrealist painter with subconscious symbolism. We can understand the title and the painting's visual imagery when we talk about "Time and Space." He declares, "It is impossible to measure time or space." To quantify time and place, we create our disciplines, laws, and routes. Consciousness, existence, and time/space are the three main components of the universe. We can see objects in space through awareness. We begin identifying those items as soon as we have a perception (Ahmad, 1987).

Aging is a process or development of destruction and deterioration, not a function of time or space. Qureshi claimed that aging destroys and degrades all living things, just as Dali depicts in his "persistence of memory." The time is still, the watches are ten years old, and everything is deteriorating. And when we look at his painting, we experience this. Geological and botanical aspects are combined in Qureshi's work. Though they originate from abstract ideas, his subjects eventually become realistic. The subsequent parts will examine Qureshi's painting in greater detail, as well as his figures, the medium of expression, and the events that occur in the world and beyond. Qureshi presents the human condition as perceived from a variety of historical perspectives. He depicts the historical perspective of real human life through the story of figures merging and resurfacing. The 'frozen' photo he took employs an emotional psychological technique to record a specific moment in place and time. The painting suggests that something happened there that led to the image depicted, a horrific or genocidal act that caused agony and will have a lasting effect on the people in front of us.

This painting allows us to see our entire history, political background, colonial era, and past all at once. It is easy to witness the misery, demise, and degradation of all the individuals as well as how they were subjected to acts of violence, brutality, murder, and genocide. And despite experiencing a great deal of adversity, humans continue to struggle. Each of them is grieving to a different extent over something horrible that happened in the recent past. We wonder about their post-traumatic stress brought on by the unidentified but assumed brutality before them in time, or maybe just some of them. Will the mother holding up her deceased child in a wondering anguish, viewed in the paradoxical golden light, seek another child to make up for her loss? Will this be a loss that she lives with forever? Numerous interpretations, including social, political, religious, and economic ones, are also provided by it. Even still, Qureshi offers a glimmer of hope by depicting the child's final embrace with his mother, despite the many terrible parts of our history. That indicates the accomplishment of the goal. In addition, the enormous tree provides people with protection akin to an umbrella, a statement that all is not lost, and an inspiration for optimism. As previously mentioned, Qureshi's ideology does not entirely align or follow in Sartre's footsteps (Rasheed Khalid, 1987). Sartre maintains that existence is older than essence, whereas Qureshi argues that essence is older than existence and that essence is predetermined even before a child is born (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1991). It can be stated that Qureshi's philosophy

is more akin to the transcendental idealism found in Kant's philosophy than it is to Islamic mystics like Ibn Arabi (Maysara Kamal, 2022).

According to Kant, concepts, or the essence of knowledge, must originate from realities that exist apart from human consciousness. However, he maintained that these realities must remain undiscovered eternally. Since knowledge can only emerge through the synthesis of concepts that make sense, human knowledge is inaccessible to them. Through its continued presence in various Kantian and Neo-Kantian philosophical schools, transcendental idealism has continued to be an important thread in later philosophy (Marialena Karampatsou, n.d.). Although Qureshi's "time and space" is obviously a narrative, it is also a description of humanity's entire past and the expertly and wonderfully represented transition from the extreme rich light to the extreme rich dark through color and tone changes. As we look at the painting, we get the impression that those figures have likewise traveled from the bright noon sun to the intensely dark colors of the setting sun, when the last rays of light fall on the people and objects. The use of vibrant colors and the contrast between light and dark tones accentuates the significance of the title, "Time and Space." The two colors that Qureshi uses most frequently are red and blue. He rarely employs any other hue with the same generosity as he does with reds and blues.

References

- Afaqi, G. (1987). Science and Art in One; the ten revelations of wisdom. *The Frontier Post*, 16.
- Ahmad, S. (1987). Exhibition of Abid's paintings opened. *The Frontier Post*, 2.
- Bureau Report. (1988). Art pieces on existentialism. *The Muslim*.
- Gulzar Afaqi. (1988). *Abid Qureshi and Semi-surrealism* (p. 14). The Nation.
- H.S. (1968). realistic phase; the new generation. *The Pakistan Times*.
- Jean-Paul Sartre. (1991). The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness.
- Khawaja Naveed. (2001). The scientist Artist. *Weekened Plus; The Nation*.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198810117.003.0021>
- Mahmood, S. (1991). From Balochistan with love. *The Nation*.
- Marialena Karampatsou. (n.d.). Immanuel Kant: Transcendental Idealism. In *Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Internet*.
- Maysara Kamal. (2022). *Ibn Arabi: Between Existence and Non-Existence*. The Collector.
<https://www.thecollector.com/ibn-arabi-existence-vs-non-existence/>
- Nizama Talib. (1993, January). Potential Rose; Semi Surrealism Phase. *The Frontier Post-Horizons*, 19.
- Rasheed Khalid. (1987). Where Science and Art Meet. *The Muslim*, 3.
- Shahid, S. (1992). A Monochrome Artist. *DAWN*, 8.
- Sultan J. Qureshi. (1995). Exhibition from Balochistan at NCA. *The Frontier Post*, 3.