



Fiona Moate



Vic Wright



Naqsh Raj

8 - 23 March 2024

HOLDING UP

catalogue of available works + exclusive interview with Naqsh Raj



INTRODUCTION

'Holding Up' draws together three artists devoted to process, place and form and have each developed their own visual language in their art-making, be it painting or sculpture.

Opening on the eve of International Women's Day 2024, the theme of this exhibition has been inspired by the book of illustrations and writing by American artist Maira Kalman, called 'Women Holding Things'. To hold has always been a significant act in feminine identity—from holding's traditional associations with the domestic sphere to which they were once contained, and all the manual and caregiving labour therein, to a feminist reclamation of the radical tenderness, and a contemporary desire to 'hold space' for the marginalised voices of women. Even today, being an artist as a woman can present challenges: we are only just seeing museums attempting to rectify the gender imbalance in their collections and, with regards to their personal life women still withstand undue attention and criticism.

While efforts to rectify historical oversights often focus on elevating overlooked female artists, 'holding [them] up' after the fact, this exhibition looks to the artists' own practices as ripe with myriad forms of 'holding'—whether it's supporting, preserving, or maintaining. We celebrate the tenderness, patience and concerted strength that characterises the work of all three. All these traits point towards an act of holding—holding up, holding down, holding together, holding steady...

"The exhibition's premise is to celebrate the idea of women holding space for art making. All be it a something else to hold, it is for many artists, a place in which to escape, take refuge and for creativity to flourish. Finding that time and place to create in the clamour of everyday life of things to hold and to carry."

– Nan Collantine

All artwork will be available to buy in person, on the website, or by enquiry to nancy@murama.co.uk.

<https://murama.co.uk>



Mura Ma is a member of the Own Art scheme, a 0% finance scheme supported by the Arts Council for UK residents to buy art over 10 months, /

FIONA MOATE



“She had, I think, an unrivalled eye for form and colour in planting, the relation between planting and the built environment, and the effects of light and shade.

“All of these things are evident from her photographs. And more than that, I think she used her photographs very much in the way she also used her sketchbooks, as source material for her paintings. These two works are amongst the most recent things she did, and they both I think derive very much from the things she saw and photographed on the morning walks in Alex Park.”

—Dave Lovely

biography

Fiona Moate (1959-2024) studied fine art at the Hull College of Higher Education in 1982 and completed her MA at Manchester Polytechnic in 1983. She worked out of artist studios including MASA and Sigma and later at her home in Stockport.

Moate taught on a number of art foundation courses in the North West and was visiting artist at MMU, Salford University, Manchester University Architecture School, Staffordshire University & Hull College of Art. She an art & design lecturer at the Manchester Adult Education Service until her retirement in 2015.

Moate exhibited widely in the North West and London throughout the 1980s and '90s. She was represented by the Ainscough Gallery in Merseyside and had a number of of solo exhibitions with the gallery. The last exhibition of her work in 2018 was 'Landmarks' with with peers including Sarah Feinmann, Steven Heaton, the late Kate Davies, Paulette Bansal, and David Armes.

Moate's paintings can be found in private and public collections in the UK, USA, Ireland, Germany, including Rutherford Collection, Oldham Art Gallery, Manchester University and Lancashire County Council.

FIONA MOATE

artists statement

From an early age, I was very aware and fond of the local landscape of the East Riding of Yorkshire. The landscape varies from the very flat estuaries, flood plains and arable land near Goole, to the gentle rolling, chalk hills of the Yorkshire Wolds. The Wolds lead to the coast, the object of many family day trips; also Sundays were often spent meandering through the Wold villages with their churches, greens and War Memorials.

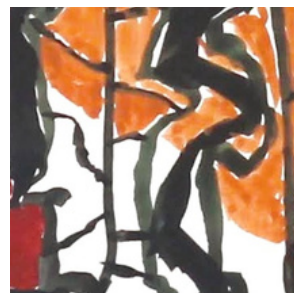
These early memories coupled with day to day visual encounters in the North West of England have informed my work. Over the years I have revisited subjects of rivers intersecting the land, wide skies, estuaries, the parks, buildings & suburbia of Greater Manchester. I am also interested in our national connection with landscape and the effect history has on our collective perception of it. Some of my paintings have addressed this with the use of texts drawn from mid 20thC county guide books. Although I do paintings and drawings from observation, I never work directly from these. My sketchbook is both a visual resource to inform paintings that I am working on and a tool to sharpen my visual perception.

I use acrylic paint or watercolour and generally build the paintings in thin layers, over painting the colour. I allow the paint to run and drip; the paintings will often reveal clues as to how they were made.

I am interested in the process of painting and the formal aspects of painting; the paint surface, colour and composition are all important to me. Though I like the paintings to be well crafted the production of a “beautiful painting” is not sufficient, I want the paintings to challenge the viewer’s perception of landscape, make them more aware of the subtleties of landscape. It is also important that the paintings achieve a sense of place and atmosphere.



Fiona Moate
Untitled (2018)
30 x 42cm
Gouache on paper
£350 framed



Fiona Moate
Untitled (2018)
36 x 30cm
Gouache on paper
£350 framed



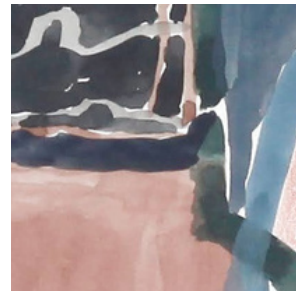
Fiona Moate
Suburban Copse (2018)
34.5 x 30cm
Gouache on paper
£350 framed



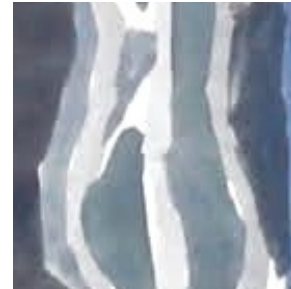
Fiona Moate
Untitled (2018)
33.5 x 30cm
Gouache on paper
£350 framed



Fiona Moate
Watching for Pigeons (2018)
33.5 x 30cm
Gouache on Paper
£350 framed



Fiona Moate
Untitled (2018)
29.5 x 30cm
Gouache on paper
£350 framed, £295 unframed



Fiona Moate
Untitled (2018)
35 x 30cm
Gouache on paper
£350 framed, £295 unframed



Fiona Moate
Untitled (2018)
34 x 30cm
Gouache on paper
£350 framed, £295 unframed



Fiona Moate
Playing Field Tree (2018)
34.5 x 30cm
Gouache on paper
£350 framed, £295 unframed



Fiona Moate
Pigeon House (2018)
34 x 30cm
Gouache on paper
£350 framed, £295 unframed

VIC WRIGHT



biography

Vic Wright (b.1976) is an artist and mother from Wigan, Greater Manchester and lives with her family in Stockport. After completing a BA Hons Fine Art at Lincolnshire and Humberside University, Wright has exhibited widely in London and the UK with Cubbitt's for LCW 2023 in London Paul Smith for the La Design Festival in 2021 and London Design Festival in 2021. Her work features in national and international private collections.

artists statement

Vic Wright creates precariously assembled forms from sustainable casting cement, softening the hard materials with pastel pigments and curved forms, and harnessing the material's weight to create an imbalance in space. Typically, Vic's work takes the form of casts. Using a base of sustainable casting cement different materials such as metal powders and pigments are added. When drying this results in different textures, colours and surfaces.

Vic has an explorative approach to her work. She wants to capture the differences between contrasting elements, to create a visual language between materials. Her work evokes the natural world, only amplified, distorted and moulded to give new context. Vic is influenced in how nature displays beauty in difference. Her interest in using industrial materials create delicate tactile results, which is a common thread throughout her work.



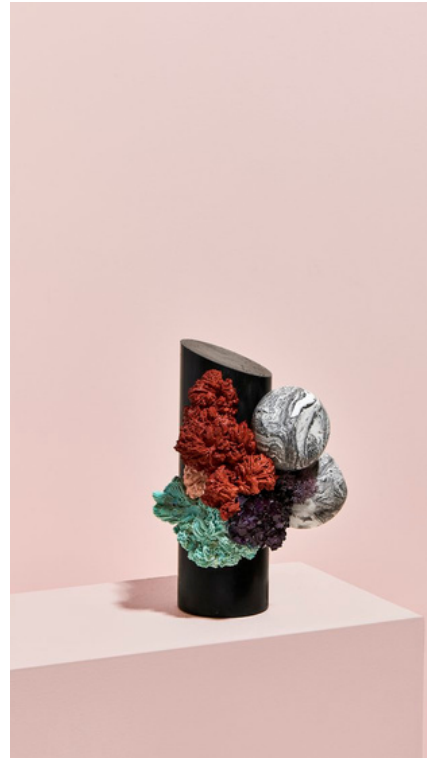
Vic Wright
Banded II (2022)
36 x 30cm
Iron, pigment & casting cement
£2500



Vic Wright
Join (2023)
20 x 18cm
Ink & casting cement
£420



Vic Wright
Standing Terracotta Facet (2022)
19 x 16cm
Casting cement and pigment
£600



Vic Wright
Knot III (2022)
21 x 17cm
Crystal, lichen, pigment, ink & casting
cement
£750



Vic Wright
Black and White with Lichen (2023)
15 x 11cm
Casting cement, pigment, ink and lichen
£245



Vic Wright
Black Balancing Sculpture (2023)
13 x 11cm
Casting cement & pigment
£180



Vic Wright
Black Sculpture No1 (2023)
18 x 11cm
Black casting cement & pigment
£220



Vic Wright
Black Speckle (2021)
11 x 7cm

White cement, pigment, ink & 24k gold
leaf
£180



Vic Wright
Terracotta Stack (2023)
14 x 9cm
Terracotta casting cement & pigment
£220



Vic Wright
Balance (2023)
13 x 11cm
Iron, ink and casting cement
£245

NAQSH RAJ



biography

Born in Quetta 1984, Naqsh Raj (b.1984) is an artist, educator and a mother. Until December 2023, Raj was teaching at the Art & Design department at Nottingham Trent International College. She studied for a Master's Degree in Visual Arts from the prestigious National College of Arts, Lahore from 2009-10. She served in Pakistan as an Art educator for ten years at Comsats University, Islamabad.

Raj has won numerous awards for her painting, including the 2024 Nigaah Award, presented at Mohatta Palace, Karachi, and in 2023 she was the main prize winner of the Open 23 at Tarpey Gallery, UK. Her work is exhibited and collected internationally.

artists statement

Naqsh believes in the strong connection between visual aesthetics and ethics, which are in a continuous process of reform. Her ongoing work is a union of mechanical and manual methods of painting, repeating a mundane technique for imprint making with human hands is the symbolism in her imagery. Possessing an empty space through relentless exertion has been her prime interest and embracing imperfection is a natural part of her current art practice.

Q&A

Q: Your work tends to be on a large scale, what is it about this particular size and scale that suits you?

There can be several reasons for my artistic choices. As a child, I was expressive, never discouraged from scribbling on my house walls. Having a limitless surface to work on was normal from the day I first held a marker or pencil. My work is not detailed but labour-based, and larger scale pieces appeal more. Even the simplest approach involves a lot of labour, so size complements my intention to practice consistency. Larger sizes symbolise my dedication to painting, much like my deep respect for manual labourers. I mainly work on square canvases for balance.

Larger paintings have one side as 7 feet, matching door heights, resulting in sizes like 7 feet by 8, 9, or 10 feet. Smaller works are challenging, needing unexpected happenings to pull me in. I give more time to resolve smaller works.

Q: Can you explain your connection to printmaking and how it helped you to develop your work?

I love the magical technique of printing. In college, I majored in painting and chose printing as my minor. Stencilling, a primitive printing stage, helps me stay organized for specific hours. After graduating, I didn't use printing in my work for a long time. It changed when I shifted from representation to an independent language. Initially, seeing works by artists like Paul Klee and Agnes Martin made me doubt, especially when I found similar works. What keeps me going is the difference in technique or process. I always enjoyed tricks like tracing, stencilling, or making prints from various objects. While mass production is fascinating, for me, printing has given me a pattern. Being impatient, using a stencil gives me a reason to wait and rest simultaneously. It helps me control my radical behaviour and wait for the right time to be myself. So, it's a mix of learned behaviour and my own organic self.

Q: How did you develop your language of abstraction, can you explain how that came about?

I was popular in school for winning several important interschool art competitions.

Facing one with a tricky theme—"Non-Objective Form"—to get ideas, I went to the school's library and came across Kandinsky's work, which seemed completely without objects. The next day, I used oil pastels to recreate what I remembered; it wasn't an exact copy, as my medium was different, and I relied on my memory as a reference. This memory stayed with me until I entered my academic training.

When, I completed my undergraduate studies at an underprivileged institution, the University of Balochistan, the curriculum was assignment-based, centered around life studies like still life, figure painting, and landscapes without much emphasis on conceptual understanding. During this time, I developed an interest in portraiture, finding it challenging, and for my final thesis, I reconstructed the Last Supper. You can already notice my natural inclination for grid arrangement in this work.

I learned a lot about paint and surfaces during my academic journey. One teacher I admired was my art history instructor; he taught us art history chronologically, more informatively than critically, up to the DADA movement. Curiosity led me to explore further, and I wanted to place Kandinsky in art history. I bought my own book, "Art Through the Ages," and started from Jackson Pollock. Abstract expression resonated with me, especially during the turbulent times in Balochistan in 2008, marked by the aftermath of 9/11. Prominent leaders in Balochistan were assassinated, creating fear in Quetta, the capital. Amid this turmoil, my interest in meaning and concept declined to zero. This emotional state made me distance myself from representation.

When I entered National College of Arts, Lahore, my shift from meaningful to meaningless representation continued. Despite my teachers' expectations for me to paint big ideas, like the Last Supper I constructed in BFA, I lost interest. In my MA work, you can see a hint of both abstraction and representation in my works. I started some abstract pieces with simple lines and thin layers but faced discouragement. I went back to observation, but this time without representation.

Right after completing my MA, I participated in an international residency with VASL. I felt frustrated during this time. My interest in drawing diminished, and I started tracing, using projectors to create my art. I started using photographic manipulations to create more abstract and meaning-free representations. Because I was now tracing and using tools like projectors, I completely unlearned my drawing skills simply because I lost interest.

One day, I had my daughter help me take a print from her Teddy bear onto a discarded canvas (visible on the left side). After this experimentation, I felt a strong pull towards it. So, one day, I applied a thin wash to the area where the bear was painted. A few days after the wash, I made my first mark through a stencil because I wasn't ready to work freehand—I was scared. The only thing on my mind was to fill a surface to a point of completion.

Completion became crucial to me because none of my paintings, even from my thesis years, reached a satisfying level. If you look at the reconstruction of the Last Supper, you'll find unfinished areas. Everything changed for me when I started teaching. It gave me a sense of authority and allowed me to practice my will slowly. It took a few years to bring everything

together and establish a practice. Isolation played a crucial role; I wasn't showing my work to too many people.

I met Nargis Khalid (may she rest in peace), who lived in the US but moved to Pakistan. She was a practicing artist herself. During her visit to my studio, she made me realize the potential of the stencil-based work I was developing slowly. Thank God I finally found someone. Finally, I made the decision to submit my stencil-based painting (Van Dyke Brown) to an open call by a gallery in Islamabad. The gallery owner organized an award-based open call. To my delight, I was awarded the third prize in 2017.

Q: It feels like colour is a highly significant force in your work, can you tell us more about this?

Van Dyke Brown introduced earth tones into my work. I delved into experimenting to capture the pleasure of Van Dyke Brown's hues. Between 2017 and 2020, I primarily used earth tones, but I found it challenging and a bit monotonous.

In my search for a new approach, I discovered oil paint sticks as an ideal medium for stencilling. I wanted to explore if this new medium would fit my practice, and fortunately, it worked well.

I purchased oil paint sticks from the US, but they aren't available in Pakistan. To find a substitute, I discovered chalk pens, mainly in fluorescent shades. While working in the UK, I could use both mediums together, making it a great time for me to paint because the art supplies were excellent.

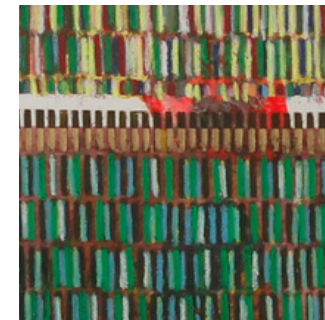
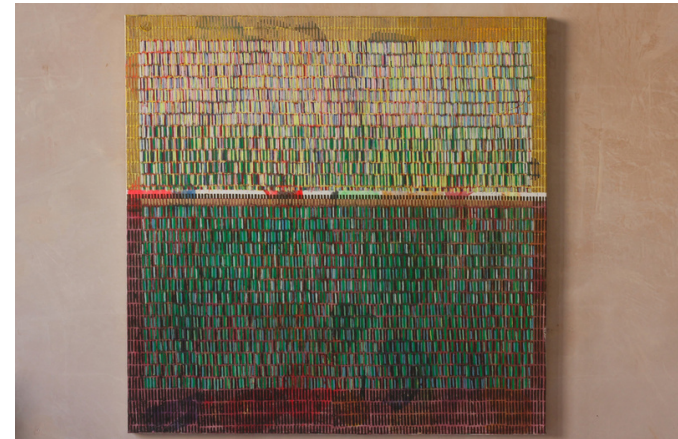
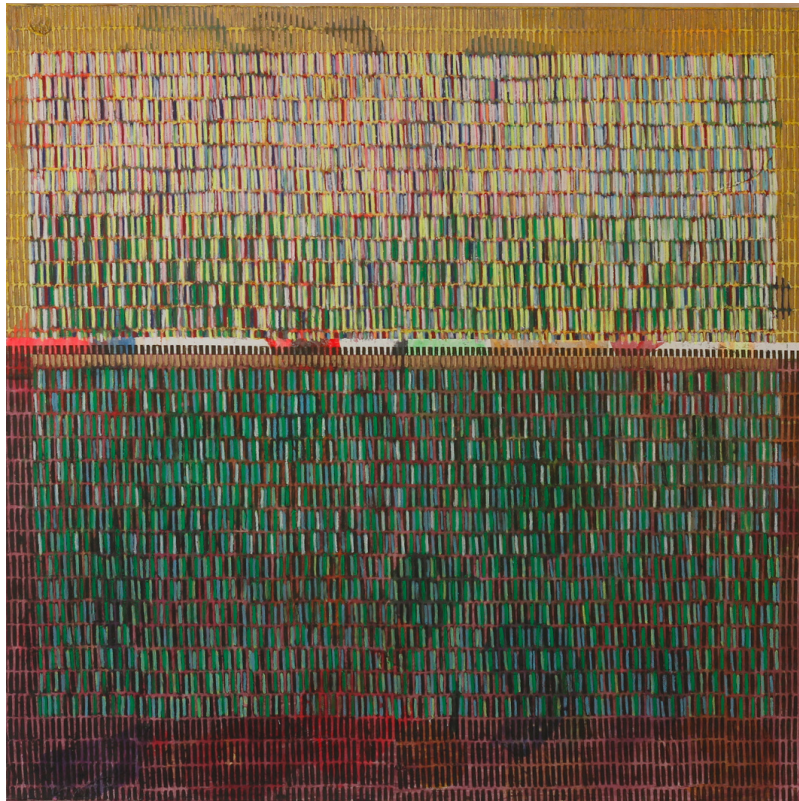
What is next for you – are you working again now you are in Pakistan? How do you think place affects the way in which you work?

I've returned to Pakistan with a lot of confidence in my art practice. I'm determined to create new pieces and maintain my connections with the galleries I worked with in the UK, Germany, and Dubai. I'm also planning to enhance my techniques to produce more artwork in less time.

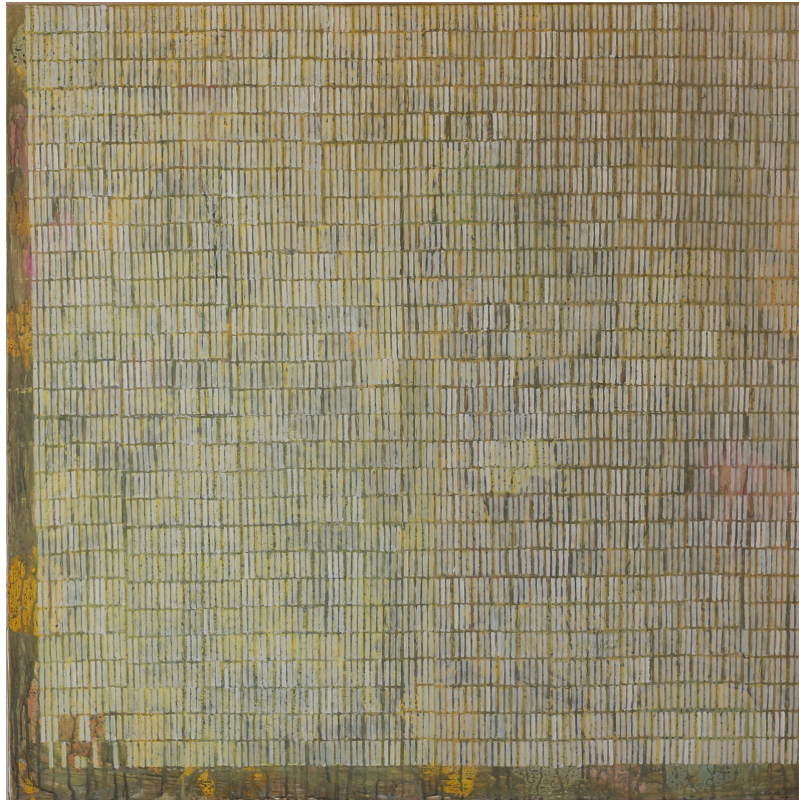
My artistic taste is evolving rapidly, so I want to speed up my process to keep up with it. Displacement has significantly altered my circumstances, influencing my mood patterns and shaping my choices in palettes, sizes, and mediums. I allow changes to happen naturally, and I believe that the environment deeply influences artistic practice, manifesting itself in subtle and indirect ways.

I reside in the outskirts of Islamabad City, in a farmhouse surrounded by green fields of various crops. Here, we witness farmers and their wives cultivating the land and sowing seeds using primitive methods, as it is an underdeveloped country. They put in tremendous effort to earn their livelihood and put bread on the table. I am developing a studio in this tranquil environment, where I can hear birds chirping, cows grazing with bells around their necks, and occasional bikers passing by. It's a quiet place, and you can catch a glimpse out the window of the gray wall dividing the crop field and our house garden.





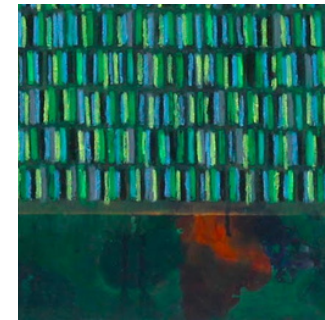
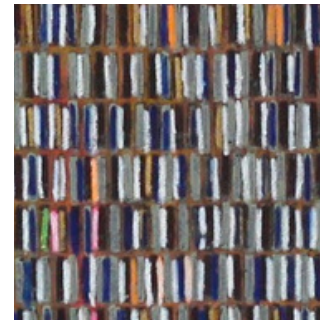
Naqsh Raj
Nature Under Construction (2023)
100 x 100cm
Mixed media
£2995



Naqsh Raj
Together Again (2023)
100 x 100cm
Mixed media
£2995



Naqsh Raj
The Silent Consonant (2023)
100 x 100cm
Mixed media
£2995



Naqsh Raj
Half Escape (2023)
100 x 100cm
Mixed media
£2995



Naqsh Raj
Hedonic Approach (2023)
100 x 100cm
Mixed media
£2995



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Photographs of Fiona Moate and Naqsh Raj's artworks: Hazel Archer © 2024

Photographs of Banded II, Join & Knot III by Vic Wright: Jason Lock © 2023

Photographs of other artworks by Vic Wright: Vic Wright © 2024

To enquire or reserve an artwork, please email nancy@murama.co.uk