

Recent events in Karachi have made clear to us the need for solidarity and unity in the art community, as well as the need for a serious re-examination of our relationship as artists and art workers to the state. As artists and art educators, we feel that the murders of Sabeen Mahmud and Dr. Waheed-ur-Rehman have direct consequences for us and our spaces, and were enacted in part as messages for our community. These murders are the most recent attacks in a long project of intimidation and silencing of intellectual and cultural discourse by our military establishment. This situation calls for a rethinking of the art community's usual tactics of protecting ourselves and our work from attacks and censorship, where the narrative of struggle has traditionally revolved around liberal notions of defending the right of creepy uncles to paint naked women. For such purposes, security barriers and guards may have been effective thus far in keeping away the mullahs and the unwashed masses – but the surveillance and killing machine we must reckon with now is different.

Over the past few decades, a systematic depoliticisation of the art community has taken place in Pakistan. The primary site has been the art school, where this process begins early on in the education and training of young artists. Despite nostalgic valorisations from those who run our art institutions today of an anti-military student activist movement emerging from art schools in the Zia era, the present circumstances betray a complete and systematic severing of the art world from society and politics. We believe that this severing is a product of an insecure and selfish art elite barricading themselves from the larger public context in order to secure lavish enclaves from within which to circulate art. This art production fails to challenge or critique power structures in any real ways because of the extent to which it is embedded within it. These circumstances are the culmination of this same valorised anti-Zia struggle, which developed anti-climactically into a comfortable understanding between the military establishment and the liberal elite, where the prior allows the latter to go on painting nudes provided they do not ruffle military feathers. The murder of Sabeen Mahmud shows us the cost of transgressing this agreement.

The art scene in Pakistan is unique in the extent to which artists and art practitioners are embedded in the art schools. The space of the art school has become the primary site for the growth, development and circulation of art production in Pakistan. The death of any critical discourse and progressive politics in contemporary art in Pakistan is a direct result of the depoliticisation of the art school, enacted and sustained through the discouraging/banning of student politics, the infantilisation of our students and the barricading of the art school from the larger urban context.

We call upon all artists and art institutions to stand together in solidarity, in this crucial moment, against state violence, surveillance and censorship. Against silencing and erasure in our spaces. To turn the gaze inward and question our means of production and circulation, and our relationship to the state and its subjects. We must refuse to retreat back into our enclaves. We must face our own complicities in today's exclusion of politics from art production. We cannot continue to do the state's work in policing and disciplining these spaces. We must protect these spaces from the state at all costs. We

must take seriously the epidemic of state targeting artists and intellectuals, and realize our own stakes in this.

As a first step in this direction we announce the opening of Karachi LaJamia, an experiment in radical anti-institutional art pedagogy. Let it be clear that we do not seek to mimic the art school, but to create a democratic space for the challenging, unlearning, and subversion of institutional pedagogies. Karachi LaJamia is situated at the intersections of art and politics, in the tradition of decolonial art movements from the global south, on our desires to imagine and build new (art)worlds, to speak truth to power and to build a progressive art community. Karachi LaJamia's first sessions will run from 8 June – 8 July 2015, each session converging at a different point in the city. We invite all those interested to participate.

For participation and more information contact: karachilajamia@gmail.com
Participation in Karachi LaJamia is free of cost.