

## *Lines That World a River* لکیروں سے دریا تھامنا

Shahana Rajani

with Ustad Abdul Aziz, Abdul Sattar and Aziza Ahmad

*Lines That World a River* is artist Shahana Rajani's (b. 1987, Karachi, Pakistan) first solo exhibition in Europe and includes contributions from Ustad Abdul Aziz, Abdul Sattar and Aziza Ahmad. The body of work in this exhibition centres practices and lineages of drawing and painting through which coastal communities in Pakistan remain connected to sacred ecologies of rivers and sea amidst the violence and erasure of infrastructure and the climate emergency.

Since the 19th century, colonial attempts to fix and control the Indus River have resulted in the construction of endless dams, barrages and canals that now make up the Indus Basin Irrigation System - the largest irrigation system in the world. As the waters of the river are redistributed upcountry for agriculture, the flow that reaches the delta and the sea is

drastically reduced. The nutrient rich sediments transported downriver are vital in supporting the unique ecosystem of the delta, a landscape composed of mudflats, creeks, estuaries, marshes and mangrove forests. Without the river, the coastal wetlands are left vulnerable to rising sea levels and catastrophic erosion. The delta is home to fisher, pastoral and agricultural communities, few of whom still live on its islands and inlets, and many other species such as the rita catfish, the hilsa, the whale shark and the Indus river dolphin – one of only a few freshwater dolphin species.

In contrast to state officials' view of the outflow of river into sea as wasted water, communities of the delta understand the meeting of the river and the sea as a sacred union that gives birth to all life and land. As rivers are disrupted, elders explain that the sea is coming forward in search of its beloved, the river.

For this exhibition, *Four Acts of Recovery* (2025) has been expanded into a new three-channel video installation, *Lines That World a River* (2026). The installation traces the ways in which displaced fisher communities of the Indus Delta turn to practices of drawing and painting murals to honour and maintain their sacred relationship to their shrines and disappearing homelands. Spread across the delta is a dense network of water shrines and saints known to oversee the sacred union between river and sea. Rather than an approach to drawing maps that is rooted in a colonial attempt to fix and control, the community practice of painting landscapes is a ritual for reconnection that draws on ancient traditions of drawing talismans in Islamic culture. Talismans and paintings become methods to invoke, protect and relate to the delta, breathing life into both the land and the water.

The video work follows and spends time with the fisher family of Abida Dablo who were displaced from their

ancestral home of Mul Creek in the Indus Delta and now live in the city of Karachi; the artists Ustad Abdul Aziz and Abdul Sattar; and the community healer Fatima Bibi whose family has practiced talisman drawing for seven generations.

The central structure to the three-screen installation echoes the form of the shrine of the saint Yousuf Shah, located in Phitti Creek. The shrine is known to protect the coast of Karachi from development projects and natural disasters alike. Every year communities return to the delta to visit their shrines during annual festivals to honour their saints, adorning the shrines with flags, bringing offerings and making prayers. In the exhibition this structure becomes a portal to witness the transforming lifeworlds of the delta.

## RELATED EVENTS

## ARTIST TALK

**Sat 7 Feb, 2pm**

**Shahana Rajani in conversation with Curator Niall Ó Faircheallaigh.**

## **WALKTHROUGHS**

**Tue 17 Feb, 12pm**

**Welcome Walkthrough**

**Explore the exhibition with our team, followed by a creative workshop with Associate Artist Amelia Daiz.**

**Wed 25 Feb, 1pm**

**Curators' Walkthrough**

**Join Nottingham Contemporary's curators, Katie Simpson and Niall Ó Faircheallaigh for a tour of our spring exhibitions.**

**Wed 4 Mar, 1pm**

**With Syma Tariq, researcher, writer and sound practitioner.**

## 12.30 Talks

12.30pm every Tue, Thu, Sat, and Sun, starting Tue 17 Feb

Join one of our friendly Gallery Assistants for a short exploration of one of our current exhibitions.

For more information about the exhibition, related events and learning programmes, visit [nottinghamcontemporary.org](http://nottinghamcontemporary.org) or scan here:



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The exhibition is curated by Niall Ó Faircheallaigh.

Exhibition design by David Thomas.

Exhibition build and installation by Helen Bartholomew, Jon Chambers, Billy Hughes, Craig Humpston, Jack Narewski, Craig David Parr, Emily Stollery, Hannah Templeman and David Thomas.

Exhibition AV by Lindley Productions.

Exhibition sound design by Mudassir Sheikh.

**Exhibition Urdu title design by Aziza Ahmad.**

**Exhibition graphics by Waste Studio.**

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**If you would like to use any alternative forms of interpretation, we have a range of accessible versions on our Access Wall beside Reception or alongside the wall text in the exhibition.**