

CORD OF DESIRES

Textile and Social Sculpture

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On September 11, 2012, a fire broke out in the textile factory "Ali Enterprises" in Baldia Town, Karachi, Pakistan. The factory was producing mainly jeans for a German discounter. Approximately 260 people were killed and hundreds more seriously injured. The fire is considered to be the most deadly industrial factory fire worldwide until today. Investigations revealed a lack of basic safety measures.

As a result of local legal action and international pressure, the victims' families were offered compensation payment amounting to several million Euros by the German company to be paid out by the end of 2017.

Although the case came to be known as a landmark ruling, the "Baldia Factory Fire" is emblematic of poorly regulated conditions of global market production in the fashion industry.



A R T = H U M A N = C R E A T I V I T Y = F R E E D O M
J O S E P H H B E U Y S , 1 9 7 6

To recognize unbalance, to carefully connect the elements involved and to seek an aesthetic equilibrium, is the basis of my artistic practice as a fashion and social designer.

In my opinion, responsibility only arises out of proximity and empathy, when someone else's situation is brought into a close relation, thus a dependency with one's own. On the other hand, modernity's goal is complete independence – from the family, from neighbors, from friends. By chain of reasoning, this results in an increase of irresponsibility. So today there are only two forms of dependency: the fixation on capital and the dependence on our feelings. Since the increase in capital does not lead to any increase in responsibility, I am interested in the interweaving of feelings/content/mind in my work. The textile contains many possibilities to transport emotions, moods and atmospheres. In my projects, the textile becomes the transmitter of feelings – and logically, a potential motivator of responsibility.

Another major part of my work as an artist is the element of participation. Being part of, and taking part in a social structure is a basic need of every living being. In the sense of Joseph Beuys' statement, "everyone is an artist" – the "making of art" for me is not the product of a single artistic

personality, but always that of a collective force, a manifestation of participation. This is why my projects revolve around chances that may be able to eliminate unbalances. At its heart, it's the homeopathic creed that like cures like which in this case means that collective conflicts can only be healed by collectivity. In order for a community to emerge, links are necessary through which individuals connect towards something collective. And this is precisely the role I play as an artist. I understand my role as receptor and mediator between the work of the groups involved. The artist when absorbed into the community becomes merely an instigator of responsibility.

CORD OF DESIRES is thus a project deeply consistent with the basic principles of my artistic practice: imbalance in the global textile industry at the expense of the weakest in the value chain, the question of social responsibility; the collaboration of different social classes towards a textile installation and the visualization of social inequalities as an opportunity for emotional participation.



+++++++ the father and his son were best friends ++++++++ he was our eldest son, 24 years old ++++++++



+++++ designed bridal dresses before +++++ he did everything by himself, without any help +++++



+++++ he was proud to work in the factory +++++ my son was working for four years there and was happy +++++



+++++ he wanted to join the Pakistani army afterwards ++++++ they say when the fire broke out he shouted: bring the denim out first ++



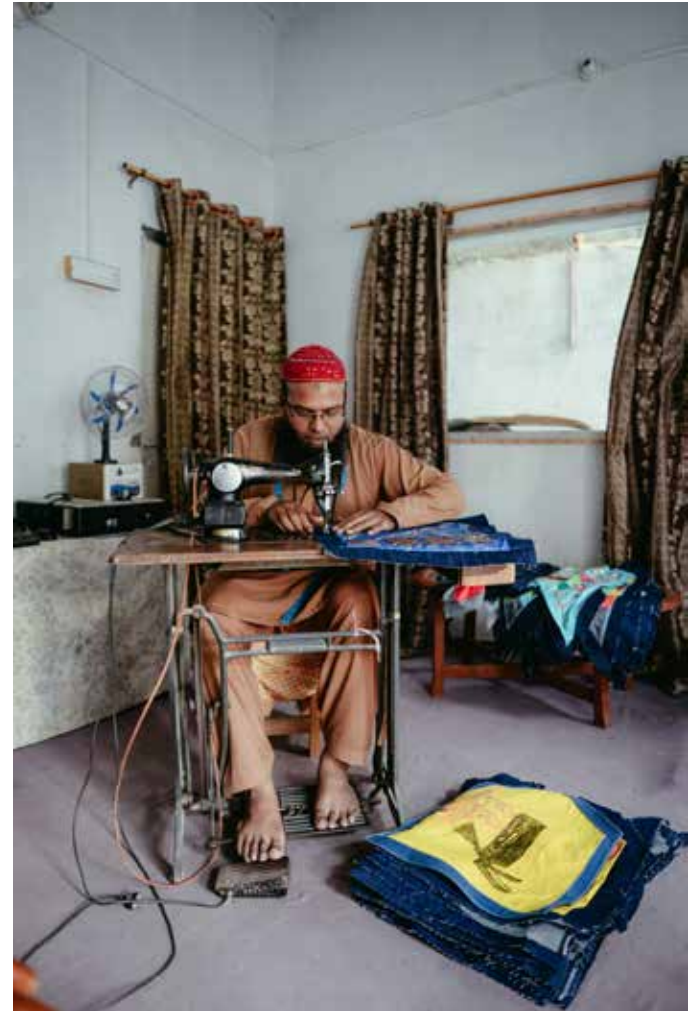
+++ my son was planning to leave this job after three more months ++++++ it was late afternoon when the fire broke out ++++++

Cord of Desires was a project that untangled an enormous cord of people, unleashing their experiences and stories, and brought them out to the forefront. What started off as a program being discussed amongst Miro Craemer, Adeela Suleman, Naila Mahmood and I at Vasl, expanded within a week's time to include more and more people, the most important of them the victims' families.

The project helped unveil issues that had been hidden in the local news and were otherwise not considered. Working alongside Miro, the task of carefully translating each word from the victims' interviews with sensitivity and accurate expression as felt by Miro was a responsibility that had to be delivered upon during the entire research process. Each interview started off with facts and figures and warmed up to experiences and stories, habits and memories of the lost souls. The course of gaining confidence from these families to share so much was an

achievement that I did not know I could gain unless Miro had not introduced the idea to me. As a resident of the city that had seen such a tragic incident of loss of lives, my understanding of the Baldia Factory Fire case was at a surface level before I took on the assistance to create Cord of Desires. Working alongside the artist and designer himself, the families, lawyers, labour unions and all others involved in the process, revealed the softer side of the tragedy. Death tolls and numbers turned into names, names into faces and families into homes. With each step towards the final outcome we got closer to the realities and learnt to be grounded with our ideas. As a practising artist and assistant to the project, the progression of Cord of Desires became a huge learning curve for me.

By the end of the residency, the amount of people and professionals who were 'connected' and weaved into the project to give it the multi-layers it had, was innumerable.



++++ there was a lot of sadness for my children after my husband died +++++ he was responsible for sewing the buttonholes +++++



++++ my brother's burnt body is missing until today, i lost him in the fire +++++ he touched my feet before leaving the house everyday+++++

Miro:

What is your name and what is your connection with the Ali Enterprise factory?

میرو: آپ کا کیا نام ہے اور علی انٹرپرائڈ فیکری سے آپکا کیا تعلق ہے؟

Zareena:

My name is Zareena and my son, Muhammad Faisal Shah used to work at the Ali Enterprise Factory.

میرو: میرا نام زرینا ہے اور علی انٹرپرائڈ میں میرا بیٹا محمد فیصل شاہ کام کرتا تھا۔

Miro:

You said earlier that Faisal earned the money for the whole family because you and your husband have health problems and your other children were still too young to work. What did your son wish for in his life? What is your most important memory of him?

میرو: آپ نے پہلے بتایا تھا کہ صرف فیصل ہی گھر کے خرچے کیلئے پیسے کاتا تھا کیونکہ آپ اور آپکے خاوندکی صحت کام کرنے کی اجازت نہیں دیتی اور آپکے باقی بچے کام کرنے کے اعتبار سے عمر میں چھوٹے ہیں۔ آپ کا بیٹا زندگی کے لئے کیا خواہش رکھتا تھا؟ اس کے بارے میں آپ کی سب سے اہم یادداشت ہے؟

Zareena:

On the morning of September 11, 2012, it was my son's birthday. But that was not the only celebration that we had to mark on that day. A cake was called for, and when my son met us that morning, his wife and I announced that he was going to be the father of his first child. His happiness was multiplied right at that moment. He went to work after that, at the denim factory, Ali Enterprise. What started off as one of the happiest days of his life took a drastic turn and became the most haunting tragedy for our family. The Baldia Factory caught fire that day and my son never returned home to continue the celebrations that started in the morning. He was burnt to death along with around 259 others.

میرو: 11 ستمبر 2012 کی صبح میرے بیٹے کی سالگرہ تھی۔ لیکن اس دن ہم ایک اور خوشخبری بھی منانے جا رہے تھے۔ ہم نے کیک منگوا دیا اور جب وہ مجھ سے ملا تو میں نے اور اس کی بیوی نے اسے بتایا کہ وہ اپنے پہلے بچے کا باپ بننے والا ہے۔ اس وقت اس کی خوشی میں چار چاند لگ گئے۔ اس کے بعد وہ علی انٹرپرائڈ چلا گیا۔ لیکن یہ جو اس کی زندگی شاید سب سے خوشی کا دن تھا وہ بہت جلد ہی ختم ہو گیا اور بہارے لئے ایک دردناک واقعہ بن گیا ہمیشہ کے لئے۔ اس دن بلدیہ فیکٹری میں آگ لگی اور میرا بیٹا اپنی خوشیاں منانے کبھی واپس گھر نہیں آسکا۔ وہ اس دن فیکٹری میں لگنے والی آگ کا شکار بن گیا اور کچھ 259 اور جانوں کے ساتھ شہید ہو گیا۔

On the opening of Cord of Desire at Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, we witnessed one of the most resilient moments when the victims' families visited the event. Amongst them was a 4 year old with his mother and grandmother. This child was introduced as the son of the man whose story has been narrated above.

(the interview was translated by Hira Khan)



air

سائس

luft

water

food

پانی

کھانا

wasser

essen

safety

peace

حفاظت

امن

sicherheit

frieden

money

پیسے

geld

recognition

تسلیم

anerkennung

respect

love

احترام

پیار

respekt

liebe

happiness

خوشی

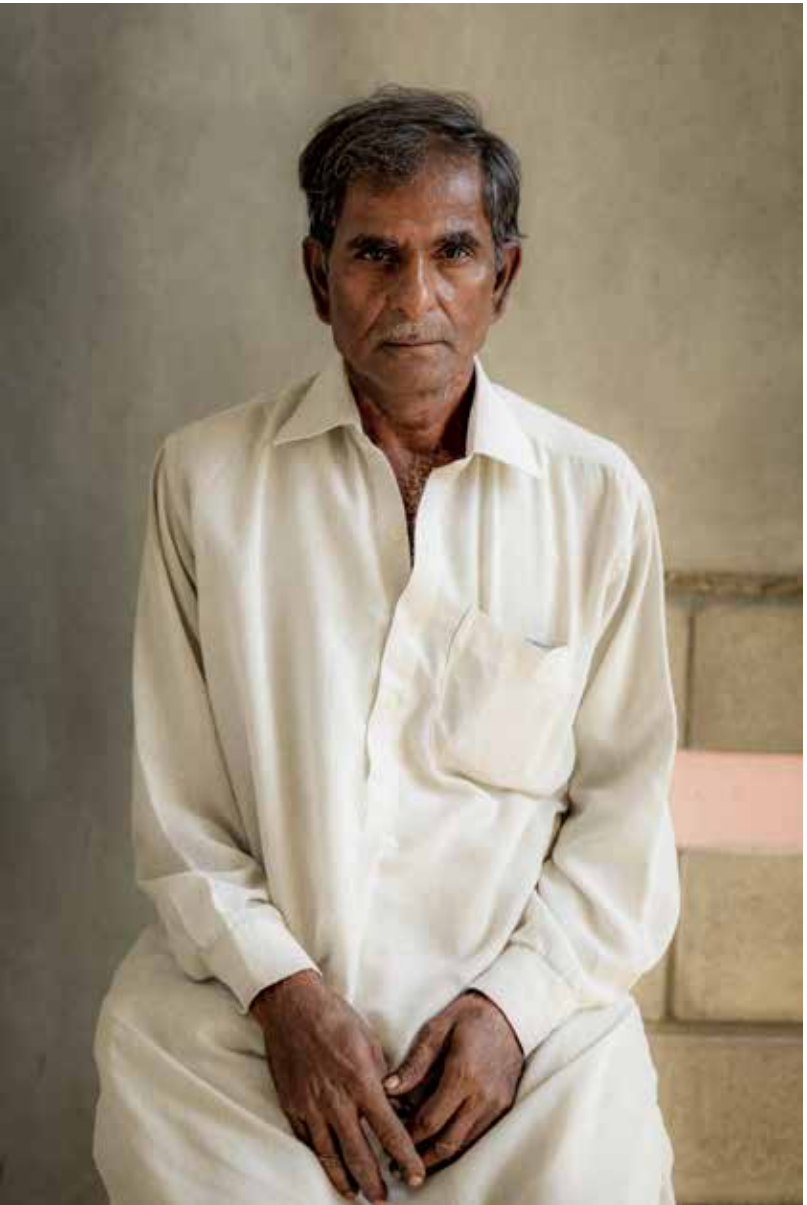
glück



+++++ he started dancing when he got the job +++++ he wanted to study after having earned enough money +++++



+++++ he loved to wear sunglasses +++++ +++++ he promised to take me to Mecca some day +++++



+++++ he wore a black cap to hide his long hair from the father +++++ he earned 6000 RS per month +++++ he was 17 years old +++++



+++++ the education of the daughters is important now +++++ I am Mohamed Sahid, my son was controlling the quality at Ali enterprises ++



+++++ he earned the money for the whole family +++++ the day he died was payday ++ he had a special relationship with me +++



+++++ he loved my Biryani +++++ +++++ + my husband was the general secretary and worked for 18 years in the textile +



++++ he was my only child and my husband died, now I'm alone ++++++ I am working as a shoemaker ++++++

INDUS VALLEY SCHOOL OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE, KARACHI

IORA UNIVERSITY NORTH CAMPUS, KARACHI

ALHAMRA ARTS COUNCIL, LAHORE







There are so many people involved in this event and let me thank everyone for inviting me and giving me an opportunity to say a few words. Although this is a art project which I think artists should speak on, and although the world of law is very alien to what we have here but this tragic event which is the Baldia Factory Fire Accident has had paradoxical consequences for these two worlds. Tragically and paradoxically and, I think, in a very joyful way even in this tragedy, these two worlds came together – which has really made difference. And it is on this issue of connectivity that I would like to say a few words on.

What is the significance of the Baldia Factory Fire?The objective significance is obvious. It had the biggest toll of deaths in any factory fire ever recorded in human history.You have to go back from 2012 to 1993 where a fire took place inThailand in which about 189 people were killed. And then you have to travel back to NewYork in 1911, to the famousTriangle Fire which really changed the world of labour law. There, it was also a textile factory where about 146 were killed.

So, sadly, Pakistan has made a world record in a very tragic category.

But there is also a very subjective significance of the Baldia Factory Fire.The world we live in, sadly, has been defined by a single event which took place in the 21st century, it's called 9/11.The Baldia Factory Fire also happened on 9/11 but it happened on 9/11/2012. So this is what I call our 9/11 or the 9/11 of the working class of this world.

That is the objective and subjective significance of the Baldia Factory Fire.

It has been very tragic event, a tragedy which is beyond words, beyond imagination, actually. But it did some very strange things to the people in Karachi, to the people in Pakistan: it led to us learning about this very dark side of globalization and interconnectiveness of the world. But this tragedy also brought to light the solidarity dimension of this globalization in two significant ways:

The first significance is why Miro is here. A very tragic event happened and it brought two countries together which cannot be more different from each other in every aspect, which is Pakistan and Germany. It brought the governments together. Of course, the government from Germany has played a very significant role in the recent settlement which will lead to about 5 Million dollars to be dispersed to the victims at the end of 2017.

But, most importantly, it also brought together people, especially artists like Miro, and it connected these people.

Now, just imagine a person like Miro. Munich, Karachi and the Baldia Factory Fire - Connectiveness.This is what tragedies do to people and should do to people. It should bring them together. So that at least some

positive and joyful thing came out of this tragedy. But it has done another thing and it is somehow strange that a person from Munich should do that.

It has actually brought this city together. Now, very few people from that part of the city where Indus Valley is located venture to this part of the city which is North Karachi. It is a divided city, like it is a divided world.

The tragedy brought Germany and Pakistan together, but the presence of Miro has now brought these two very different and divided parts of Karachi together.

We are very grateful to Miro for his sense of connectiveness and solidarity which his art has actually brought to the people of Pakistan. So I would like to thank him again for his effort and for his presence.

IQRA University
 North Campus, Karachi,
 November 24, 2016

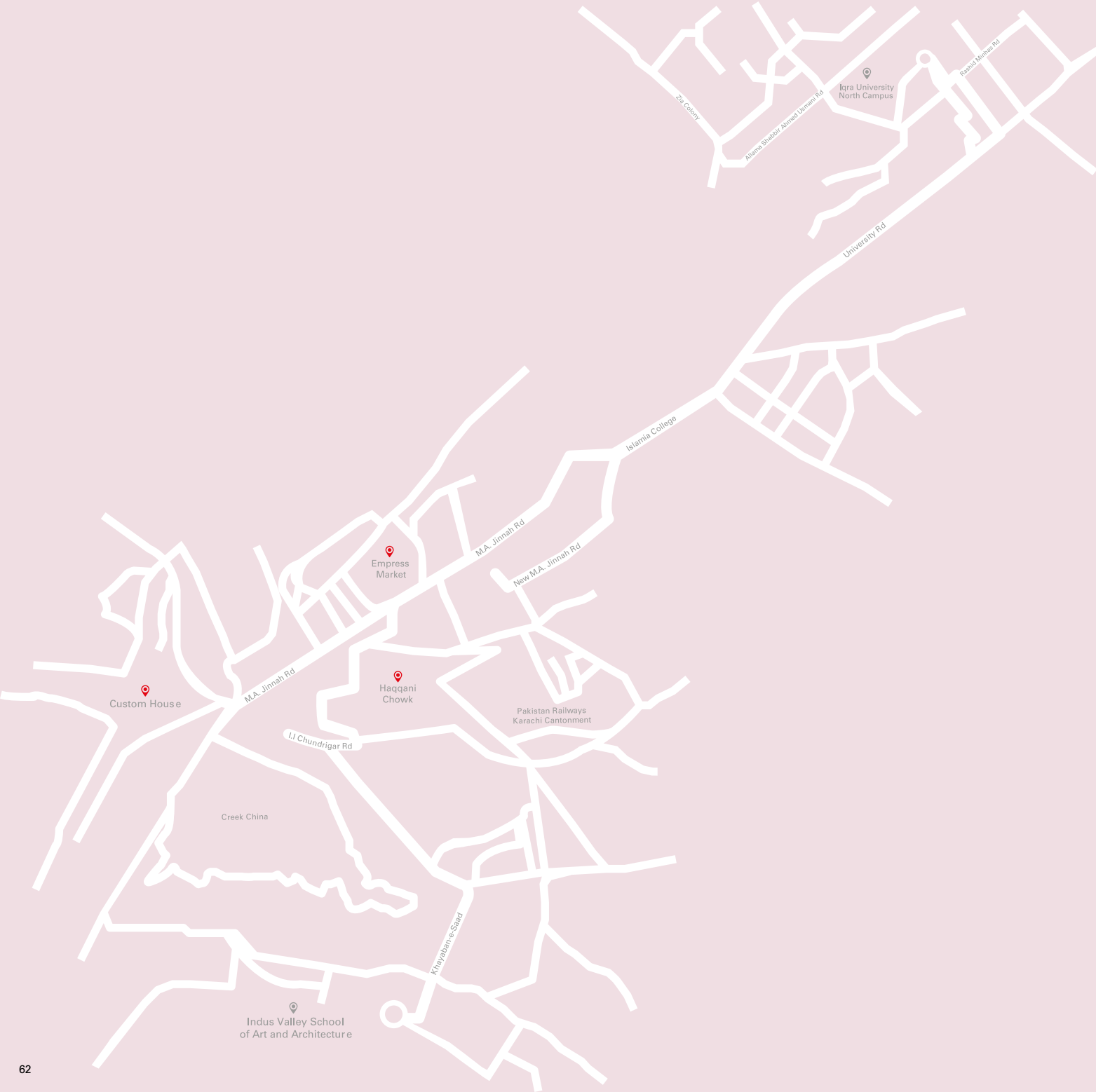








- ◉ **EMPRESS MARKET, KARACHI**
- ◉ **PAKISTAN CHOWK (HAQQANI CHOWK), KARACHI**
- ◉ **CHARYA CHOWK (NEAR CUSTOM HOUSE), KARACHI**

















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CORD OF DESIRES by Miro Craemer was created during his two-months artist residency in Karachi, Pakistan, hosted by Vasl Artists' Collective, in the framework of **Urbanities – art and public space in Pakistan**.

Urbanities – art and public space in Pakistan is a critical exploration of the urban, its complexities and possibilities under the premise of individual artistic work and research approaches. Throughout 2016, the partner project between the Goethe-Institut Pakistan and the Lahore Biennale Foundation, in collaboration with Vasl Artists' Collective, Annemarie-Schimmel-Haus, Marvi Mazhar & Associates, and other partners, incited discursive and artistic contributions related to Pakistan's controversial and contested urban space. By recollecting Henri Lefebvre's "right to the city" for critical discussion, the project aimed to enable a broad audience to engage with contemporary art and urban space, and to link the emerging generation of artists, curators and urban researchers in Pakistan with the scenes in Germany within the broader framework of the curatorial processes leading up to the Lahore Biennale.

The project **Urbanities – art and public space in Pakistan** was conceived by Stefan Winkler, Goethe-Institut Pakistan, and directed and co-curated by Sara-Duana Meyer.

Photo credits

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